INSIGHT COMPACT GUIDES

MALTA

The Compact Formula

First orientation is provided by the backcover map. It shows you the islands' geography and highlights the location of suggested routes described in the main Places section of the guide.

The routes provide the menu to the sights. Follow them right through or simply pick and choose according to your own particular taste and the time you have available.

The star system highlights the importance of the main attractions – particularly useful if you're in a hurry:

★★★ *an absolute must* ★★ *very interesting* ★ *well worth seeing*

Sights in the cities have numbered references which allow you to locate them easily on strategically placed maps.

Corresponding directly with the text, colour photography throughout provides you with that vital visual link.

Colour coding provides easy access both to the routes and to the sections on Culture, Leisure and Practical Information.

APA PUBLICATIONS
Part of the Langenscheidt Publishing Group

INSIGHT COMPACT GUIDES

Malta

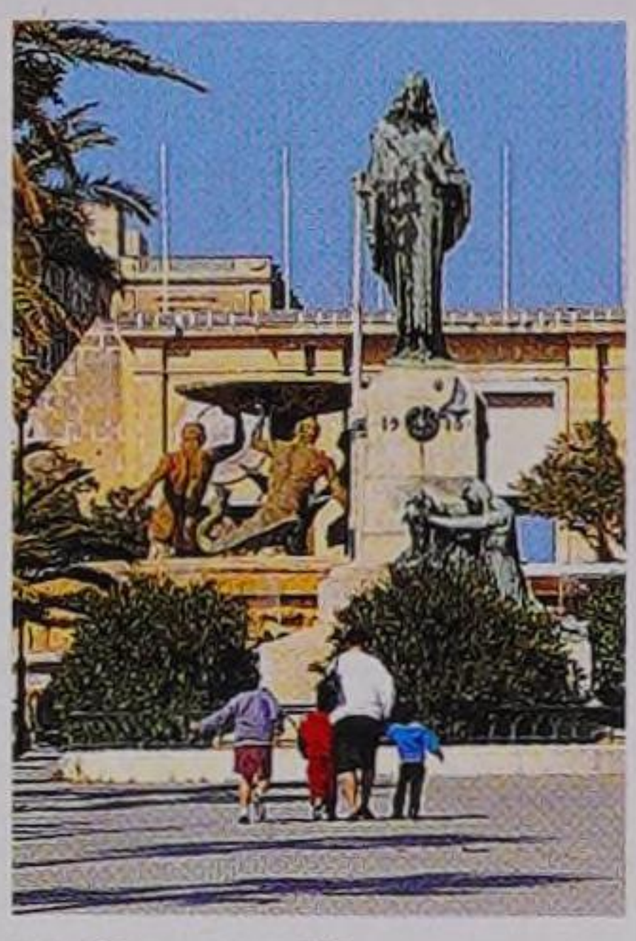
GREAT LITTLE GUIDES

Compact Guide: Malta **is the ideal quick-reference guide to this tiny archipelago between Europe and Africa. It tells you everything you need to know about Malta's many attractions, from crystal-clear coves to colourful fiestas, monumental churches to mighty walled cities, and Neolithic temples to neon lights.**

This is just one title in *Apa Publications'* new series of pocket-sized, easy-to-use guidebooks intended for the independent-minded traveller. Based on an award-winning formula pioneered in Germany, *Compact Guides* pride themselves on being up-to-date and authoritative. They are in essence mini travel encyclopedias, designed to be comprehensive yet portable, both readable and reliable.

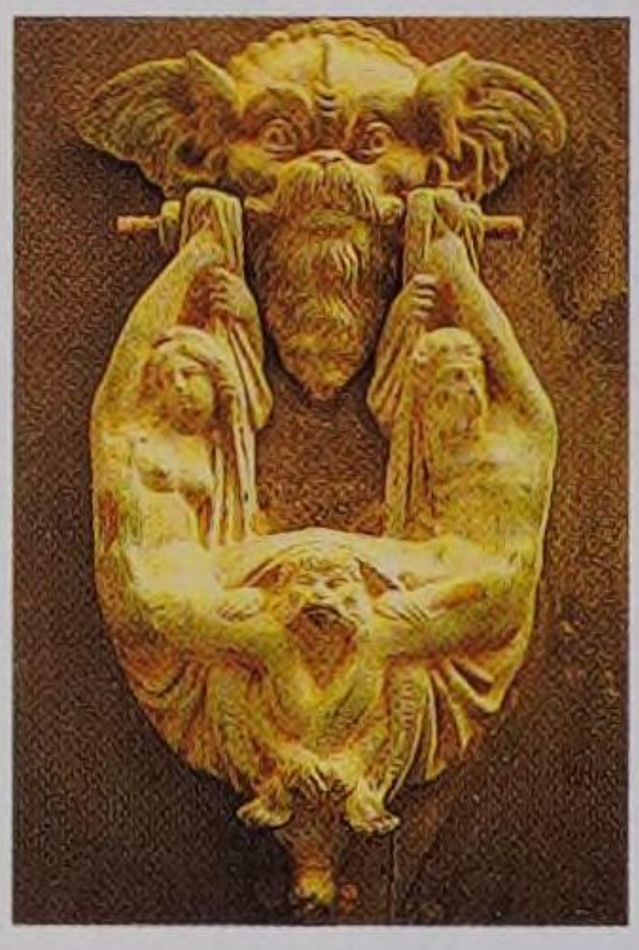
Star Attractions

An instant reference to some of Malta's most popular tourist attractions to help you on your way.



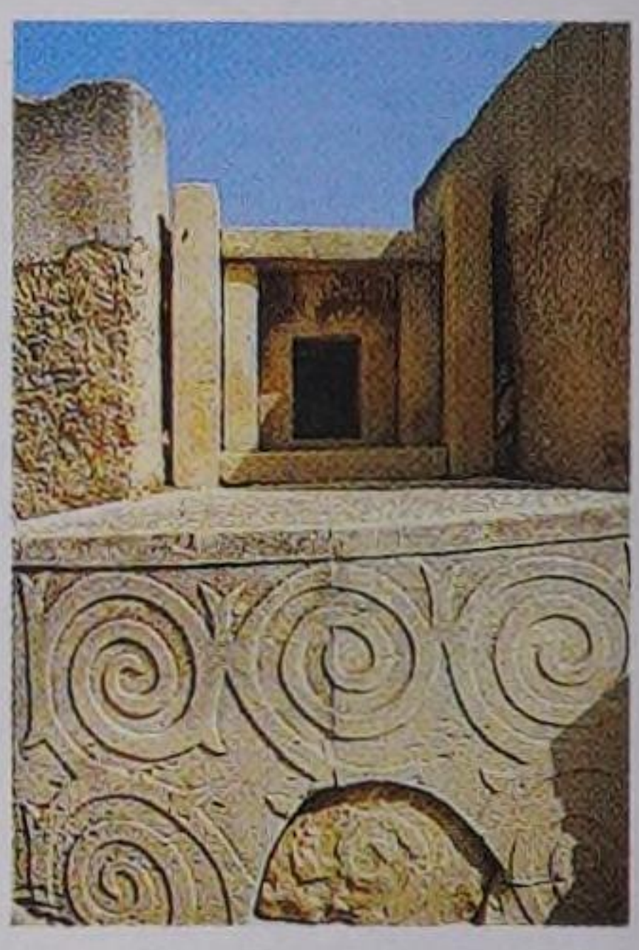
Valletta, p18

National Museum of Archaeology, p22



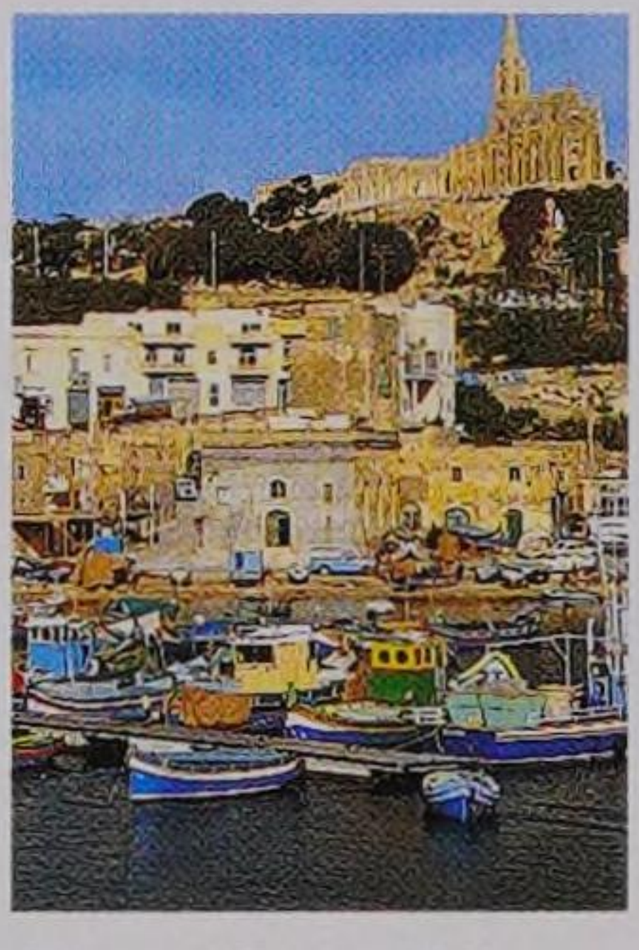
Mdina, p41

Vittoriosa, p50

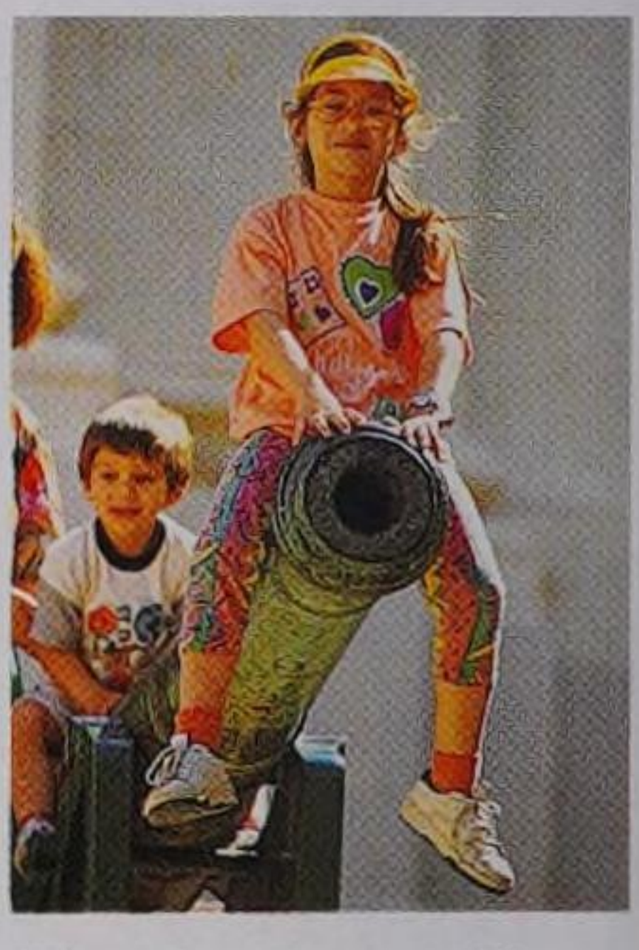


Tarxien Temples, p56

The south coast, p60



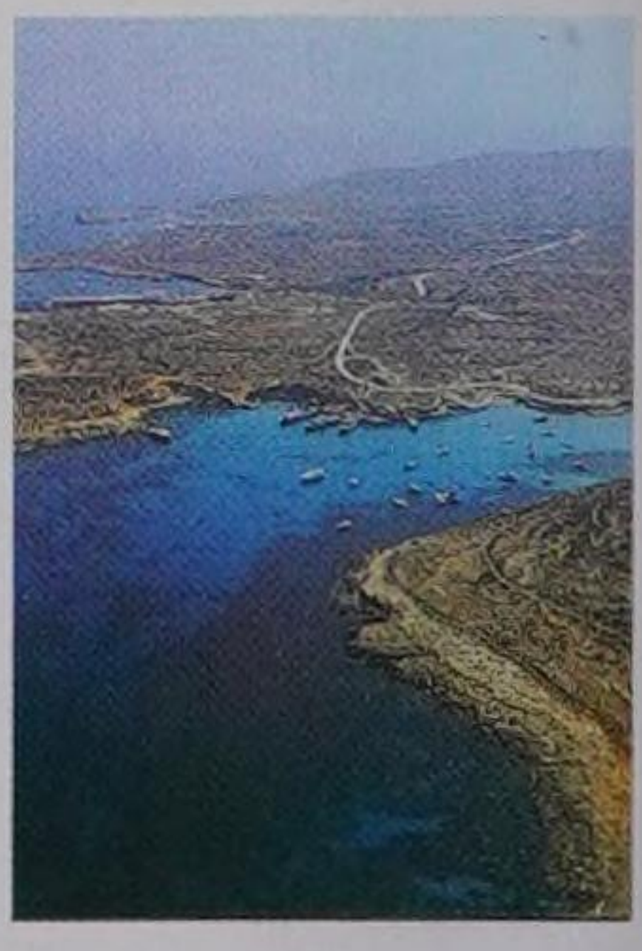
Mgarr, Gozo, p66



Victoria, Gozo, p66

Grand Master's Palace, p26

Marsalforn, Gozo, p69



Comino, p71

Malta

Introduction

Malta – An Island Paradise 5
Historical Highlights 11

Places

Route 1: Valetta 18
Route 2: The north coast 36
Route 3: Mdina and Rabat 40
Route 4: Malta's churches 49
Route 5: Prehistoric temples 55
Route 6: The south coast 60
Route 7: Gozo 65
Route 8: Comino 71

Culture

Archaeology, Art and Architecture 73
Theatre, Music and Festivals 76

Leisure

Food and Drink 79
Shopping 82
Nightlife 85
Sports and Recreation 86

Practical Information

Getting There 89
Getting Around 90
Facts for the Visitor 92
Accommodation 95
Index 96

HUGHES-IGLA-14-2-96

:HUGHES:

Malta – An Island Paradise

When Emperor Charles V of Spain ceded Malta to the Order of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem (Knights Hospitallers), the Knights immediately sent a deputation to find out more about their new domicile. The reports that came back included descriptions of the terrain: '...rocks of soft sandstone. The rocky ground is covered with sand no deeper than three to four feet.' That was in 1530, but impressions hardly changed over the centuries: 'Malta is a strange place – a dry, bath-brick island that glares and sets your teeth on edge and is so dry that one expects oneself to begin to crackle,' wrote DH Lawrence in a letter in 1920.

Visitors to Malta today may well gain similar impressions – the predominant colours here are the golden-yellows of the sandstone houses set against the burnished ochre colour of the ground. But they will also be struck by something which the knights of old probably cared little about, namely the intense blue of the surrounding sea. The touristic attraction of Malta – ie the Maltese Islands of Malta, Gozo and Comino – is based on the guarantee of good Mediterranean seaside weather from the end of May to the end of October. Anyone coming here can also look forward to clean, crystal-clear seawater, something which has become something of a rarity along today's Mediterranean coastlines.

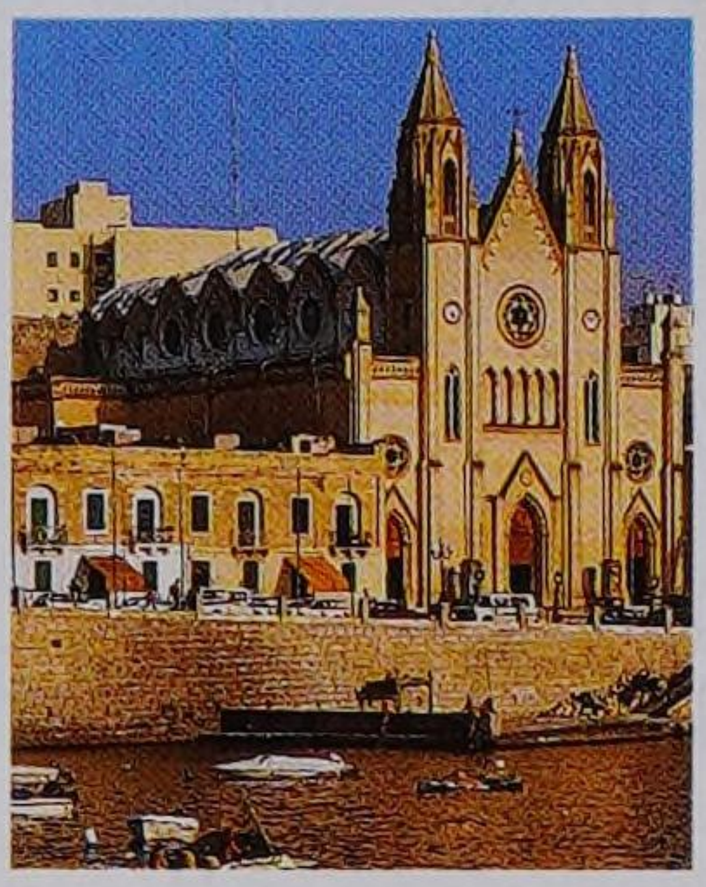
The many foreign powers that ruled Malta during its long and turbulent history all endowed it with an impressive cultural heritage: magnificent baroque buildings dating from the time of the Hospitallers, medieval towns, as well as a number of unique and mysterious Neolithic temples – fascinating examples of a prehistoric culture which even today we know very little about. They were built during the 4th millennium BC – long before the Egyptian Pyramids – and are the oldest monuments of their kind still in existence. The high level of culture during this epoch, which came to an abrupt end in around 2500BC, is documented by the fascinating exhibits on display in Malta's archaeological museums at Valletta (Malta) and Victoria (Gozo).

The number of churches on the islands and the sheer size of many of them is also a big surprise for many first-time visitors.

The Maltese are among the most good-natured and polite people in the world. They work hard but don't take things too seriously, and know how to laugh at themselves as well as with everyone else.

With its reliable summers, warm seas, friendly people and fascinating cultural heritage, Malta provides an ideal mixture of discovery and relaxation.

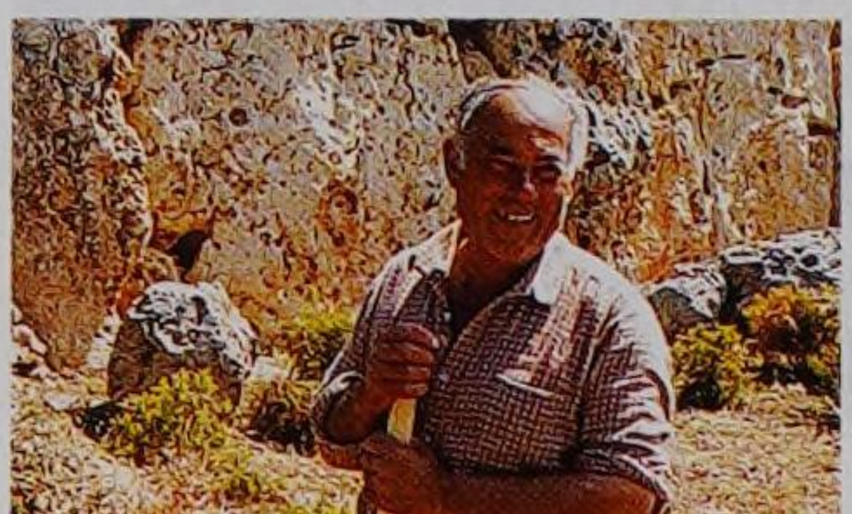
Opposite: the Vedette at Senglea



Impressive cultural heritage

Seas of colour

Warm, friendly people



Position, size, landscape

The Malta archipelago lies 93km (58 miles) south of Sicily, 350km (220 miles) north of Libya, and around 290km (180 miles) east of Tunisia and the African coast, and is all that remains of a strip of land that once joined Africa and Europe. The archipelago consists of five islands in all: Malta (the largest), Gozo, Comino, and uninhabited Cominotto and Filfla. The rocky mountain range on the main island of Malta reaches elevations of around 260m (850ft); the landscape is stony karst with hardly any freshwater springs. The island has a surface area of 246sq km (95sq miles) – one sixth the size of Greater London – and is bisected by the Great Fault which separates the hilly southeastern region from the flatter northwest. The southern part falls steeply down to the sea, and the rocky limestone ridges have very little vegetation; the northern part is similarly barren, though the odd surprising view more than makes up for it. One of the best is from the Red Tower above Mellieha Bay (*see page 39*), where the narrowest section of the island provides a panoramic view of both coasts, romantic rocky scenery and the islands of Comino and Gozo.

Even though Gozo resembles Malta geologically, its landscape seems gentler than that of the neighbouring island, probably because of its numerous fertile valleys. The island is only 14km (9 miles) long and 7km (4 miles) wide. There are fewer sharp contrasts in the terrain, and the whole place is much greener.

Yellow daisies

Flora and fauna

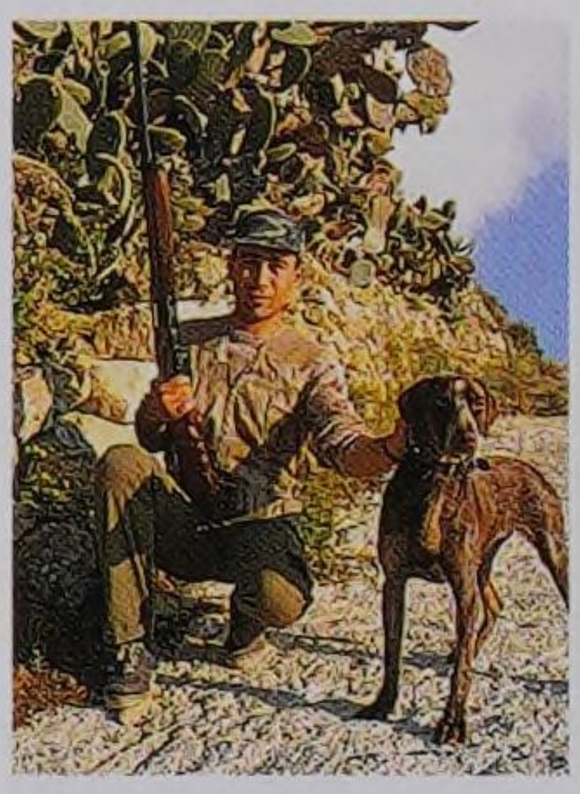
The vegetation on the Maltese Islands is sparse; centuries of overgrazing have resulted in complete deforestation. The British alone had around 80,000 olive-trees felled in the 19th century to create room for the lucrative cotton industry. The Buskett Gardens, laid out as a hunting preserve for the Hospitallers, give a good idea of what Malta might have looked like. The island was once as green as Sicily; vegetation on Malta is most evident during the winter months now, when the bare rocky areas are carpeted with colourful flowers. The landscape is covered with carob trees, fig cacti, ginko trees *(Auricularia)* and agaves, while in the residential areas bougainvillea and oleander form a delightful contrast to the honey-coloured houses.

The sparse vegetation provides habitat for small animals and birds – the legendary Maltese falcon died out long ago. But keeping songbirds in cages is a Maltese hobby, and several can be seen on balconies. All kinds of migratory birds (starlings, storks, wild ducks, swallows

Maintaining old traditions

and quail) stop over here during their flights between Central Europe and the warmer south. That's when the amateur hunters all stream out and fire at them. This indiscriminate shooting has become a serious political issue; the environmental protection legislation which has been in force since 1994 is meant to put a stop to it.

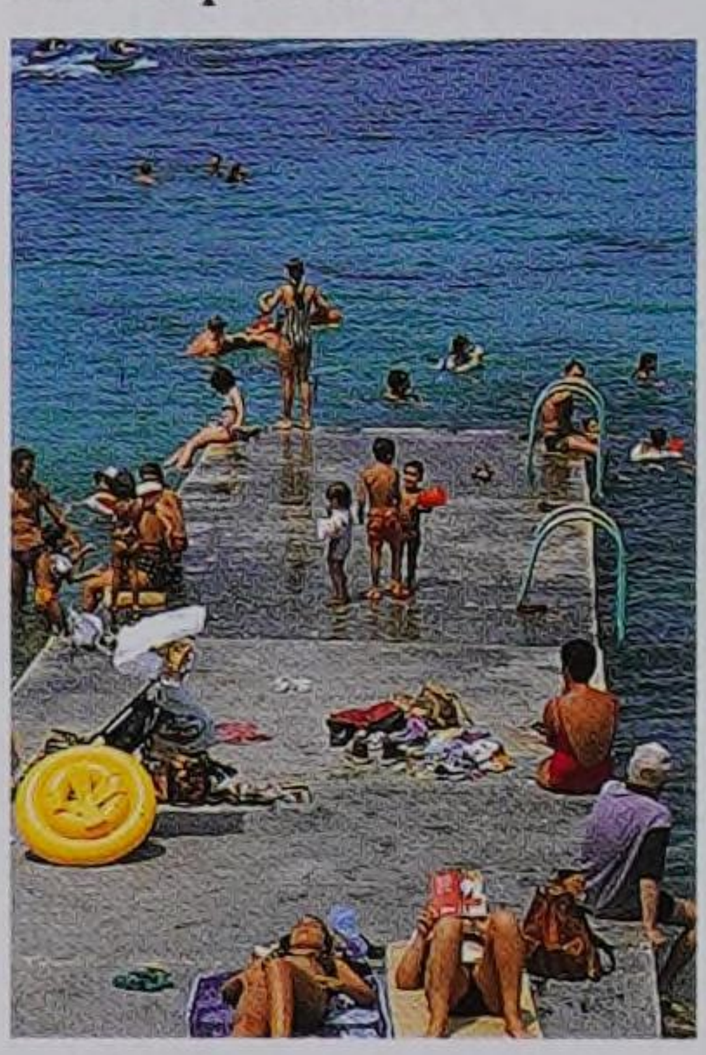
New debate



Climate and when to go

The climate of Malta has been its fortune. Even in winter the temperature rarely drops below 12°C (54°F). Snows or frosts are unknown and rain is likely to fall only between November and February. Between April and September, there is virtually non-stop sunshine. Temperatures of 40°C (104°F) are quite common during June, July and August; that's when government offices close at 2pm and everyone goes to the beach.

Non-stop sunshine



For sports holidays the brief transition periods – ie April to May and October to November – are the best times to come to Malta; the weather is warm but not overly so, and conditions are still very pleasant for hiking. Those intending to do so should bring along sunscreen lotions however: there's hardly any shade, and sturdy footwear is needed to cope with the rocky terrain. A good map is also necessary. Take along lots to drink too – there are hardly any refreshment kiosks anywhere.

The Maltese

Not even the Maltese themselves are able to give a confident explanation of exactly who they are. One thing is certain: today's islanders are definitely not the ancestors of the Neolithic temple-builders (*see page 73*): for unknown reasons the islands were uninhabited for several centuries after that time. Hardly any traces have remained of the peoples of antiquity – Carthaginians and then Roman colonists – nor of the radical changes during the Early

Fishing tackle

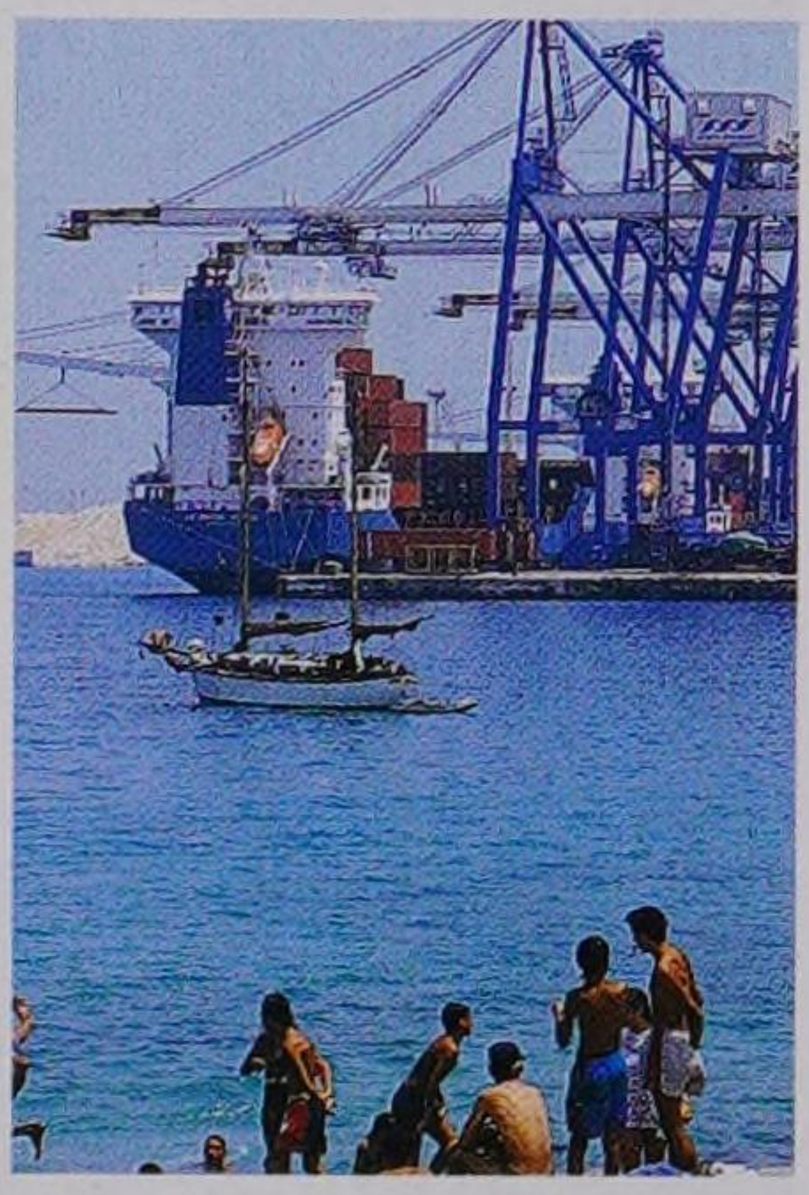
Middle Ages. Goths and Vandals passed through briefly, but it was only when the Arabs arrived in AD870 and separated Malta once and for all from the Byzantine empire that the Maltese Islands and their neighbouring island of Sicily received entirely new populations. During the Norman *reconquista* the Mediterranean was subjected to several more mass population movements: Arabs from Sicily who had been converted to Christianity were moved to Malta, and Muslim Maltese to the mountains of Southern Italy. The Maltese kept themselves mostly to themselves during Malta's many years as a fortress colony, but large groups of immigrants kept arriving on the island as mercenaries, workers or slaves, and the British even stationed an Indian regiment here.

The Maltese language

Today's visitors to Malta are faced with something quite unique: the Maltese speak an Arab dialect around 20 percent of which is enriched with borrowings from the Spanish spoken by the Aragonese, the French of the Hospitallers and the English of the British colonialists. *Malti*, as it is called, is the only Semitic language officially written in Latin script. The original transcription was the work of Mikiel Angel Vassalli (1764–1829), considered the father of Maltese literature.

Until 1934 the official languages on Malta were Spanish, Italian or English, but the local populace conversed in Maltese. There was no real contact between the foreign rulers and the ordinary people, but the Roman Catholic church played an important role as intermediary, and its priests translated and administered.

English is taught in the islands' schools and almost all Maltese are fluent in it. Italian is also widely understood; a historical reason for this, apart from the proximity of Sicily, is perhaps because Italian was the official language of the Knights of St John.



Kalafrana Container terminal

Economy and environment

Until the arrival of the British in the early 19th century, the economy was based on small-scale trading and the export of items such as cotton, linen and honey. But the British transformed all that as they redeveloped the dockyard. Founded by the Knights of St John for servicing their galleys, the dockyard was expanded to service the large British Mediterranean fleet based in Malta. In time it became a cornerstone of the island's economy, which in turn became dependent on London's defence expenditure.

Since independence in 1964, succeeding governments have invested heavily to transform Malta into a tourist, industrial and financial centre. By the early 1990s, Malta was attracting over a million tourists annually and the late

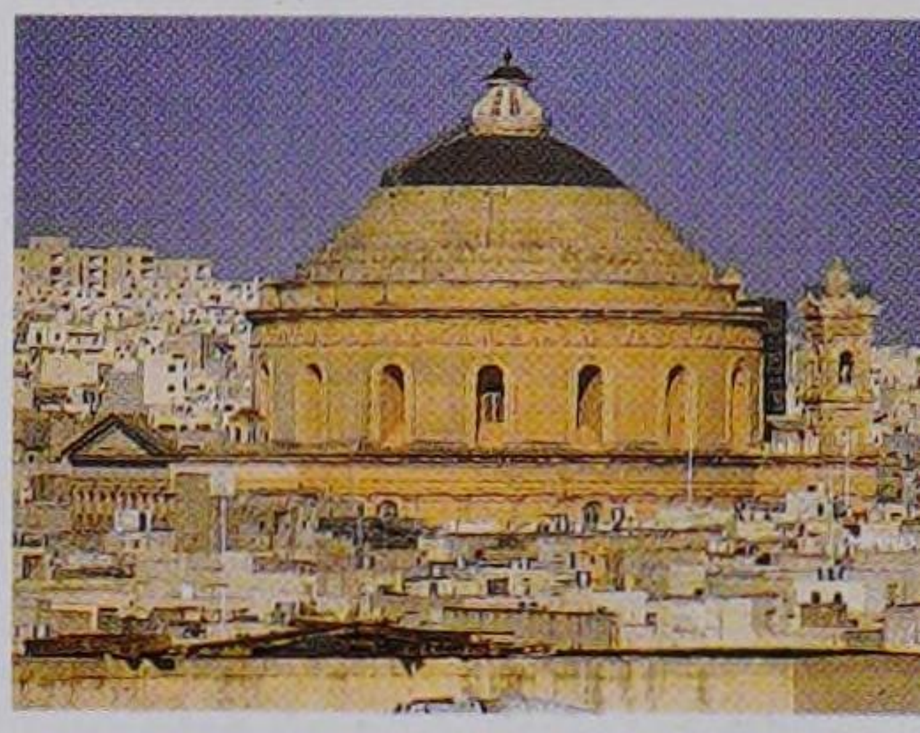
1990s saw the construction of several five-star hotels. Industry originally attracted investment through low wages and tax relief schemes, but this is no longer viable and today Malta relies more on the skills of its highly-trained workforce, originally acquired through the dockyard. The dockyard itself, however, has become a financial millstone, hit by economic recession and lack of modern technology.

Meanwhile, growth in tourism, financial services and light, high-tech industries is limited by the natural constraints of a large population swollen further by returning emigrants in the early 1990s. Increased levels of tourism have placed great strains on the infrastructure and utilities, particularly the water supply. Construction activites have declined because of rising costs and dwindling available space in one of the most densely-inhabited places in Europe. The government is still eager for the economy to expand further; only time will tell whether the whole concept is right for this little paradise.

Religion plays an important role

Religion

Malta is still staunchly Roman Catholic, and the older Maltese in particular are deeply religious. Divorce and abortion are illegal, but the status quo is being challenged by the younger generation, many of whom prefer rock music to the soothing sound of an organ. There is currently an active on-going campaign to legalise divorce. The importance of the role played by religion on the islands is reflected not only in the enormous number of churches, but also the sheer size of several of them. Malta's largest one is the church of St Marija Assunta in Mosta, which can accommodate a congregation of 12,000 (*see page 53*).

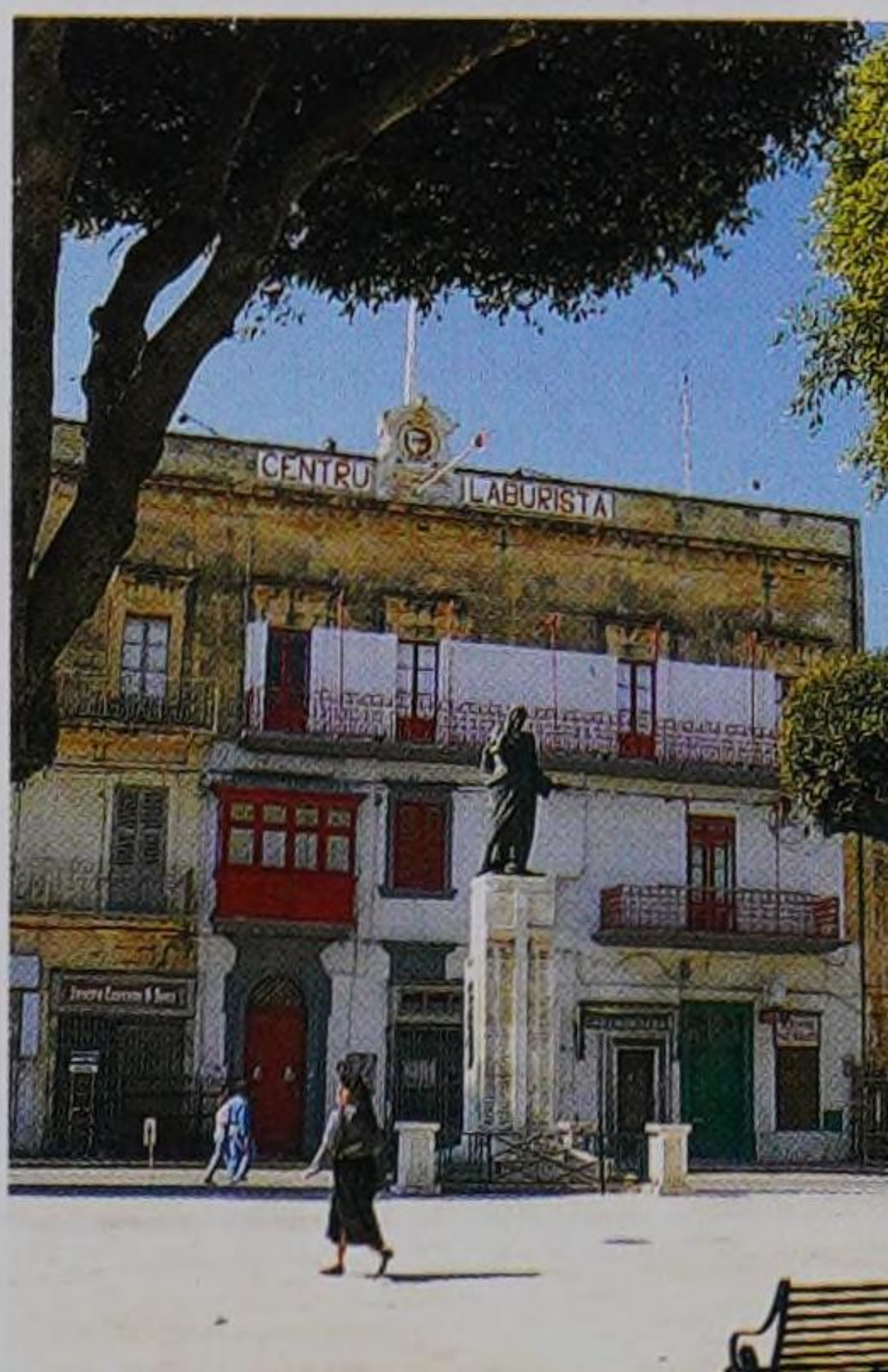


St Marija Assunta

Political Life

The Maltese have always been passionate about politics. Traditionally, opinions were sharply divided between followers of the two main parties, the Malta Labour Party (*Partit Laburista*) and Nationalist Party (*Partiti Nazzjonalista*). This continues to be the case, particularly after the decline of the centrist Alternative Democratic Party (*Alternattiva Demokratika*). But gone is the old bitterness and rivalry engendered, for example, by the heated linguistic debate of the 1920s about whether English or Italian should be the official language, or the long struggle between the Nationalist and Labour parties over the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, which sometimes erupted into violence on the streets. Since independence in 1964, the changeovers in government have been smooth. The bitter divisions of the past finally ended in 1987 when the Nationalist Party was returned to power on a thumping majority. In 1996, a much more moderate Labour Party was returned to power.

The Labour Party Club, Victoria



Malta Dry Docks

Independence and Neutrality

When Dom Mintoff's Malta Labour Party won the 1971 general election, Malta underwent dramatic changes. Famed for his tough horse trading, Mintoff renounced the defence and economic agreements signed with Britain just before independence in 1964 and demanded either a better deal from Britain and NATO or complete economic independence. After protracted negotiations, a lucrative new deal was signed, lasting until 1979 when the British base closed and military ties with NATO were severed.

At the same time, Mintoff's government was pursuing a policy of nonalignment. It secured supplies of cheap oil from Libya and signed one of the first economic agreements with China. It also negotiated finance from the US and Saudi Arabia for a seawater desalination facility, purchased coal for electricity generation from Poland and brought in Czech specialists to run the health service.

When Malta was granted full independence in 1974, the young republic committed itself to strict neutrality. But Malta's close ties with Libya and the continued interest of the then Warsaw Pact countries caused considerable concern in the West and created sharp political divisions at home. After a change of government in 1987, the Nationalist Party confirmed Malta's neutrality but maintained its strong ties with Libya. At the same time, the government clearly opted for Western credentials by introducing legislation to transform Malta into a financial centre. In 1990, Malta applied for membership of the European Union, but after a further change of government in 1996, the Malta Labour Party, now guided by Prime Minister Dr Alfred Sant, withdrew the EU application and requested it be 'frozen'. The current policy towards the EU favours existing trade agreements while negotiating Malta's eventual entry into the EU on a long-term policy basis.

Historical Highlights

Malta has often been compared to a 'palimpsest' – an ancient original manuscript erased and written over several times. Throughout history, the islands' strategic location has attracted every powerful nation of the Mediterranean world.

6000BC During the Neolithic period the earliest settlers arrive on Malta and Gozo, probably by sea from Sicily. The first temples are built from 4800BC onwards. A religious cult of the dead is introduced.

3400–2400BC Copper Age. Megalithic temples, with oval-shaped rooms and passageways, appear on Malta and Gozo. Mysterious cart-ruts are produced by sleds. The underground complex known as the Hypogeum is built near Paola.

2300–850BC Bronze Age. Fortified villages with defensive walls are built, eg Borg in-Nadur.

850BC The Phoenicians, merchants from the eastern Mediterranean, settle the islands. They use the safe harbour (malet = refuge) as a trading post. Inscriptions, coins and tombs remain on Malta as a reminder of their presence.

600BC Carthage, originally a Phoenician colony, conquers Malta and controls sea routes in the Western Mediterranean.

218BC During the Second Punic War between Carthage and Rome, a Roman expedition commanded by Tiberius Sempronius captures Malta (Melita) and Gozo (Gaulus). The islands become part of the Roman Empire, and the Romans build their capital on the site of the old Carthaginian one (on the hilltop where Mdina stands today).

AD60 On their way to Rome as prisoners for trial, St Paul and St Luke are shipwrecked off Malta. St Paul stays for three months and converts the entire populace – including the Roman governor, Publius, whose sick father he heals – to Christianity. Publius becomes the first bishop of Malta, and is later martyred and canonised.

AD395 Division of the Roman Empire. Malta belongs to the western half along with Sicily, whose fate it shares until the arrival of the Knights of St John (Knights Hospitallers).

476 Collapse of the West Roman Empire. Malta is conquered by Goths and Vandals during the 5th and 6th centuries.

535 Justinian, the emperor of the Eastern Empire (527–565) has Sicily and Malta conquered for Byzantium by his general, Belisarius.

870 The Maltese Islands are conquered by the Aghlabid Caliphs. Cotton, citrus fruit and figs are introduced to the islands from the mid-10th century onwards. The Arabic language is adopted along with the Islamic religion.

1090 The Arabs are driven out of Malta by the Norman count Roger I, son of Tancred de Hauteville. Malta becomes part of the Kingdom of Sicily. Arabic remains the national language, but Islam is gradually replaced by Christianity.

1194 Malta is ruled by the German House of Hohenstaufen after the Norman kings die out.

1224 Emperor Frederick II has supporters of Islam on Malta sent to Lucera in Southern Italy.

1263 The Angevin succession. The French House of Anjou takes over Sicily and Malta, and drives out the last of the Hohenstaufens.

1282 The Sicilian Vespers: Sicily shakes off the unpopular rule of Charles of Anjou (brother of the French king Louis IX) and supports the Aragonese king, Peter III.

1282–1530 Aragonese rule Sicily and Malta.

1435 Malta is divided into 12 parishes (cappelle) each with a parish priest (cappillan).

1453 The Ottomans conquer Constantinople and seal the fate of the Byzantine Empire. Southern Europe is placed under continual threat of invasion for the following centuries.

1479 Affiliation of the Houses of Castile and Aragon means that Sicily and Malta now form part of the new Spanish Empire.

1516 The Habsburg and Spanish empires are united under Emperor Charles V.

1523 The religious military order of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem (Knights Hospitallers) is driven from Rhodes by the Ottomans.

1524 Emperor Charles V offers to cede Malta as a new domicile to the Knights of St John. The grand master's sole obligation in return for the gift is the annual presentation of one falcon to the emperor's viceroy in Sicily.

1530 Malta and Gozo are ceded to the Hospitallers. Grand Master Philippe Villiers de L'Isle-Adam arrives at Birgu (Vittoriosa) and the neighbouring Senglea peninsula with 4,000 men.

1551 Corsairs from the Barbary Coast in the pay of the Ottomans attack Gozo, and enslave almost the entire population. The Knights of St John speed up their work on fortifying Malta.

1565 The Great Siege. For three months, Suleiman the Magnificent's Ottoman fleet lays unsuccessful siege to the Hospitallers' new base.

1566 Construction work begins on the new capital, Valletta. Malta becomes a bulwark of Christianity against the Islamic threat. Soon Valletta is the best-fortified city in Europe.

1574 The Sacra Infirmeria, the hospital of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem, is founded. It becomes world-famous for its high standards.

1614 Grand master Alof de Wignacourt (1601–22) has an aqueduct built between Valletta and Mdina.

1638 Landward fortification belt is completed.

1641 A Turkish army of 6,000 men attacks Malta without success.

1660–80 Under grand masters Raphael and Nicola Cotoner, the 'three cities' on the landward side are fortified. The whole region becomes known as Cotonera.

1683 The Turks are defeated outside Vienna. A phase of consolidation begins on Malta.

18th century The end of the Turkish threat ushers in a wave of construction activity; Malta and Gozo receive many fine baroque structures.

1789 The French Revolution and subsequent confiscation of property belonging to religious orders, including that of the Knights of Malta.

1798 Napoleon takes Malta without a fight. The Knights are forced to leave the islands, bearing only their holy relics and personal possessions.

1800 Uprising against the French.

1802 The Treaty of Amiens returns Malta to the Knights of St John, but subsequent Maltese protests prevent the Order from returning. The Maltese call the British fleet under Admiral Nelson to their aid.

1813–1864 Malta is formally recognised as a British colony at the Treaty of Paris, and Sir Thomas Maitland takes over as its first governor. He introduces sweeping reforms. During the second half of the 19th century Malta experiences an economic upswing as a trading harbour and an important British naval base.

1869 The opening of the Suez Canal places Malta at the forefront of Mediterranean trade.

1870 Construction of the Victoria Lines, a series of forts along an escarpment near Bingemma.

1919 The 'Bread Rebellion' breaks out on 7 June as a result of British pricing policies on imported grain. There are several fatalities.

1921 Britain grants Malta its own constitution and partial self-rule.

1934 Maltese is raised to the status of an official language alongside English.

1939–43 Malta suffers severe aerial bombardment during World War II. For months the island is cut off from supply lines, causing severe famine. In recognition of Maltese heroism, Britain awards the islands the George Cross, which can still be seen on the national flag today.

1964 Malta gains its independence in the Commonwealth.

1974 Proclamation of the Republic of Malta.

1979 The last British forces leave.

1989 In early December Malta hosts the first summit between US President George Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, marking the end of the Cold War.

1990 Malta applies to join the European Union.

1992 Queen Elizabeth II dedicates the World War II Siege Memorial.

1996 Malta withdraws European Union application and requests 'frozen' application status.

The Knights of St John

When they arrived on Malta in 1530 the Knights of St John had already been around for four and a half centuries. The Order was founded in Jerusalem in 1099 to care for sick pilgrims in the Holy Land, but its originally charitable role soon assumed a military character after its battles with Islam. The military Knights had to prove they were of noble birth without any trace of illegitimacy for four generations on both sides of the family, and were hence the most exclusive aristocratic body in Europe. The grand master was himself a knight elected by his brethren.

Before their arrival on Malta the Knights had been defeated by the Muslims on several occasions, most recently in Cyprus (1291) and Rhodes (1308–1532). The secular Order divided itself up into eight *langues*, or 'tongues' – symbolised by the eight points on the Maltese cross. Three of these were French (because during the 13th century France was divided up into France, Provence and Auvergne), and the others were Castile, Aragon, England, Germany and Italy. Each *langue* possessed its own *auberge* (inn) and contributed to the defence of Malta – the first UNO of modern times.

The Order was nominally under papal control and functioned like a state in its own right; it was not allowed to make pacts with any European powers. Power and jobs were strictly regimented: only those who had spent three years on a galley, three in a monastery and thirteen more as an emissary of their particular Langue were allowed to become grand masters. The aim of the Order – defence against the 'infidel' – also included looting ships (to help pay for the highly expensive fortifications) and liberating Christian slaves. The Ottomans' Great Siege of 1565 was heroically resisted; tactical errors by the enemy, an early spell of bad weather and a Spanish fleet that arrived in the nick of time only just managed to avert yet another disaster for Christendom after the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

During the two centuries of rule by the Knights that followed, the strategy and much of the spending was based on the idea of a renewed Ottoman threat. Malta prospered at first, but as the Americas became more attractive to seagoing trade, the Order grew increasingly dissolute; after the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, its final collapse was just a matter of time.

In the year 1792 the French revolutionary government confiscated the possessions of the Knights of St John, and the latter thus lost their main source of income. No-one in Europe was unhappy about this: the Ottoman threat had long since been banished, and an exotic police force in the Mediterranean was no longer needed. On the other hand, Malta's strategic position was more than familiar to the great powers: Austria, Spain, Britain and naturally France too would have accepted it as a base very quickly. After their sudden loss of sponsorship the Hospitallers desperately sought a strong partner; they were also under considerable pressure from the Maltese themselves because of domestic political problems with the Maltese and the Church.

Odd though it may sound today, the Russian tsar and also the USA both showed great interest in investing in Malta; the Russians had had their eye on the islands for some time, and this had not escaped European attention. When negotiations with the USA bore no fruit in 1794 the way was open for Moscow, and the Malta issue seemed to have been resolved. In 1797, however, the Directory decided to take up the matter again: Talleyrand thought it advisable to beat the others to it. So first of all supplies were stopped and then Malta was annexed (1798). Napoleon's request for fresh water was a feeble excuse, supported by the powerful pro-French lobby among the Hospitallers and the population. One wonders how a Russian presence on Malta might have affected the course of European history.

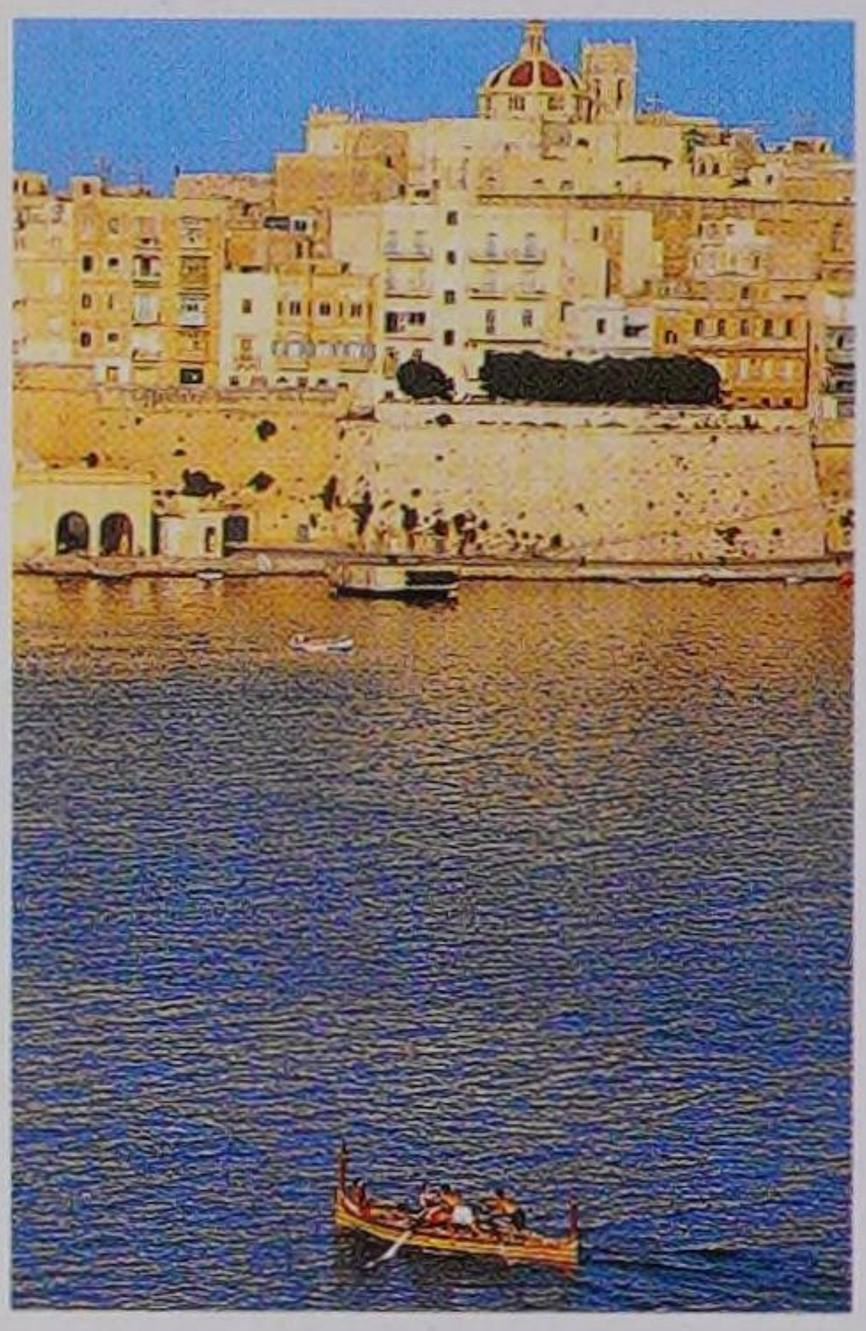
After the Order was expelled from the island by Napoleon in 1798, it seemed to be finished for good – but papal protection in the mid-19th century meant that it could be founded anew. Today some of the original ideals of the Knights of St John are carried on by the St John Ambulance Association; the Order itself, now based in Rome, continues its humanitarian tasks in many parts of the world.

F.11
FGI

Gozo
Comino
Comino Channel
South Comino
Armier Bay
Paradise Bay
MARFA RIDGE
Red Tower
Biskra
Popeye Village
Anchor Bay
Mellieha Bay
St. Paul's Island
Mellieha Church
Mellieha
Selmun Palace
Xemxija
MELLIEHA RIDGE
St. Paul's Bay
Qawra
Salina Bay
Bugibba
Salt Pans
Bahar ic-Caghaq
Manikata
Ghajn Tuffieha
Golden Bay
Ghajn Tuffieha Bay
Gnejna Bay
Roman Baths
Lippija Tower
Zebbieh
Skorba Temple
Mgarr
Naxxar
VICTORIA LINES
Mosta Church
Mosta
Fort Bingemma
Nadur 239
St. Martins 214
Mtarfa
Mdina
National Stadium
Ta'Qali
Ta'Qali Craft Centre
St. James's
Rabat
Mtahleb
Dingli
Verdala Palace
Buskett Gardens
Clapham Junction
Cart Ruts
253
DINGLI CLIFFS
MEDITERRANEAN SEA

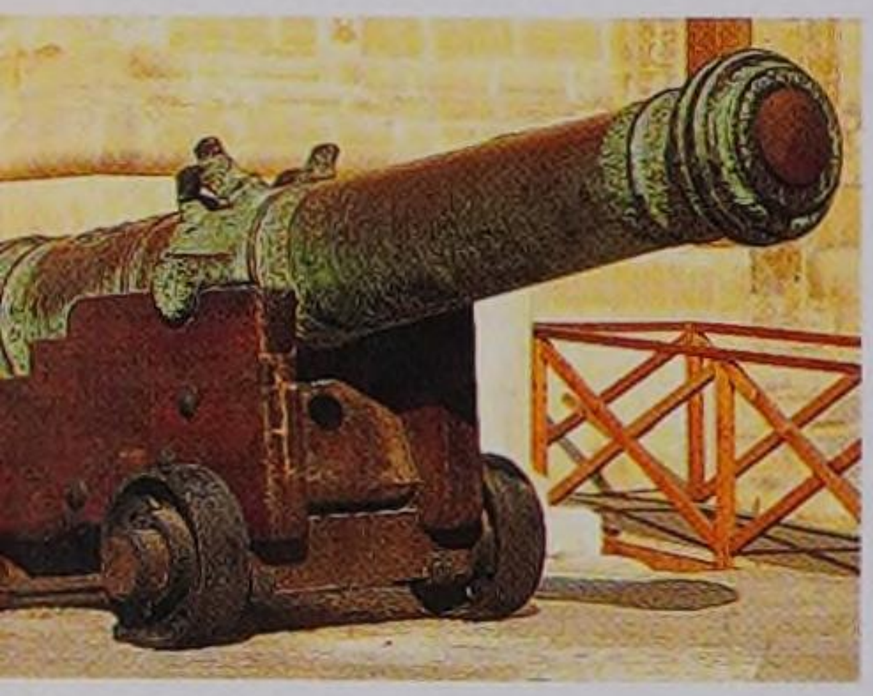
MALTA
ROUTES 1–6
N
0
0
3 miles
3km
MEDITERRANEAN
SEA
Sicily
Splash & Fun Park
St. George's Tower
St. George's Bay
Madliena Fort
St. Julian's
Sliema
Gharghur
Gzira
2
Valletta
1
Floriana
Vittoriosa
Kalkara
Birkirkara
Msida
Senglea
Cospicua
Zabbar
Lija
Balzan
5
Santa Venera
Hamrun
Marsaskala Bay
Attard
Marsaskala
Marsà
Paola
Tarxien Temple
4
Qormi
Hypogäum Hal Saflieni
Tarxien
Zejtun
St. Thomas Bay
Zebbug
Luqa
Ghaxaq
St. Grigor
6
Ta' Bir Miftuh
Marsaxlokk
Airport Terminal
Gudja
Siggiewi
Kirkop
Ghar Dalam
St. Lucian Tower
Mqabba
Borg in-Nadur
Marsaxlokk Bay
Birzebbuga
Pretty Bay
Tal Providenza
Safi
Qrendi
Zurrieq
Kalafrana
Hagar-Qim Temple
Mnajdra Temple
Ghar Lapsi
Blue Grotto
Ghar Hasan

Preceding pages: St Julians' waterfront



The Grand Harbour, Valletta

Testimony to a turbulent history



Route 1

Valletta – Malta's capital

The tastes and origins of the Knights of St John (*see page 13*) determined the face of Valletta in the 17th and 18th centuries. The many different facets of this fortress city reflect a variety of influences, but the whole radiates a cheerful dignity: the mighty bastions and fortifications enclosing Valletta have now become historic monuments affording excellent views of one of Europe's most attractive natural harbours.

Valletta is the economic and business centre of Malta, and also the seat of the island's government; the harbour docks employ a larger workforce than anywhere else. After the shops and offices close the whole city becomes eerily deserted; the population has halved over the past 30 years (today's Valletta has just 9,200 inhabitants). Although the scars of World War II have been removed, many of the buildings are in bad structural condition. Renovation work has already started, but whether the city will be able to exchange its museum-like character for a new vitality remains to be seen.

History

Valletta was built after the successful defence of the island against the Ottoman siege of 1565. The Spanish king Philip II and the pope both contributed funds towards its construction, and the city was named after the Provençal French grand master of the Order of the Knights of St John, Jean de la Valette (1557–68). Though the Turks had been successfully repelled in September of 1565, the danger was by no means over. Since speed was of the essence, the pope sent his architect Francesco Laparelli da Cortona (1521–70) to Malta. Cortona had worked with Michelangelo on St Peter's in Rome, and the pope told him to plan a new city on the Sceberra promontory, which at that stage had no buildings on it apart from Fort St Elmo.

Laparelli worked fast and on 3 January 1566 he presented his design for the new city to the grand master: a chessboard-like plan, with the main thoroughfares pointing towards the end of the promontory. The streets follow the natural terrain, with the result that many of them are very steep or rise in steps, thus often seeming to disappear into the horizon. Malta thus received one of the first planned cities of modern times, and today the ensemble is under UNESCO protection.

Laparelli was called back to Rome on urgent business in April 1568; construction work was already well advanced, and he had no qualms about leaving the rest of the task in the capable hands of his Maltese representative

City Gate and the Triton Fountian

Gerolamo Cassar (1520–86). It was Cassar who turned Valletta into the 'city of palaces'. The Order of the Knights of St John sent Cassar to Rome in 1569 for further training, and he left an imposing architectural legacy: seven *auberges* (inns), the Grand Master's Palace, the Co-Cathedral and plans for many other churches.

Walking Tour of Valletta *(see map overleaf)*

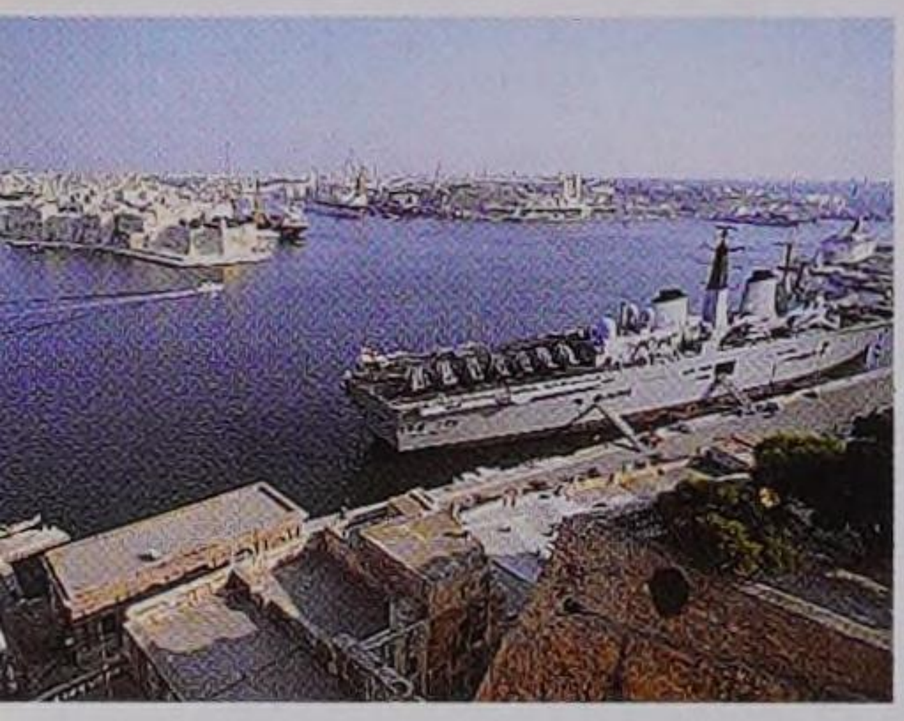
Next to the grandiose **Triton Fountain** ❶ is the City Gate Bus Station, the terminus for all the bus routes on the island. The Great Ditch, part of the old fortifications, leads via a new gate built in 1968 to Freedom Square, which is surrounded by a shopping arcade. Nearby are the melancholy ruins of the former Royal Opera House – by now, half a century after the end of World War II, the city's visiting card should really have been renovated. The **Church of Our Lady of Victories** ❷ was built in 1566 in thanksgiving for the Turkish defeat, directly above the first foundation-stone of the new city. Opposite is the church of the Langue of Italy, **St Catherine's** ❸, designed by Gerolamo Cassar; its porch with the decorative columns is a successful later addition made by Romano Carapecchia (1713). Mass is celebrated in this church at 11am every Sunday.

Castile Place, the highest point in Valletta, is dominated by the facade of the former **Auberge of Castile** ❹. Originally the seat of the Knights of Castile, today it is the official seat of the prime minister. This two-storey Maltese Baroque building has distinctive green shutters on its windows, and the portal is accentuated by a flight of steps and double columns. Manoel Pinto de Fonseca, the longest-serving grand master (1741–73), commissioned the building in 1744 from the architect Andrea Belli.

St Ursula Street begins on the opposite side of Castile Place at the end of a flight of steps. The **Upper Barracca**

Auberge de Castile

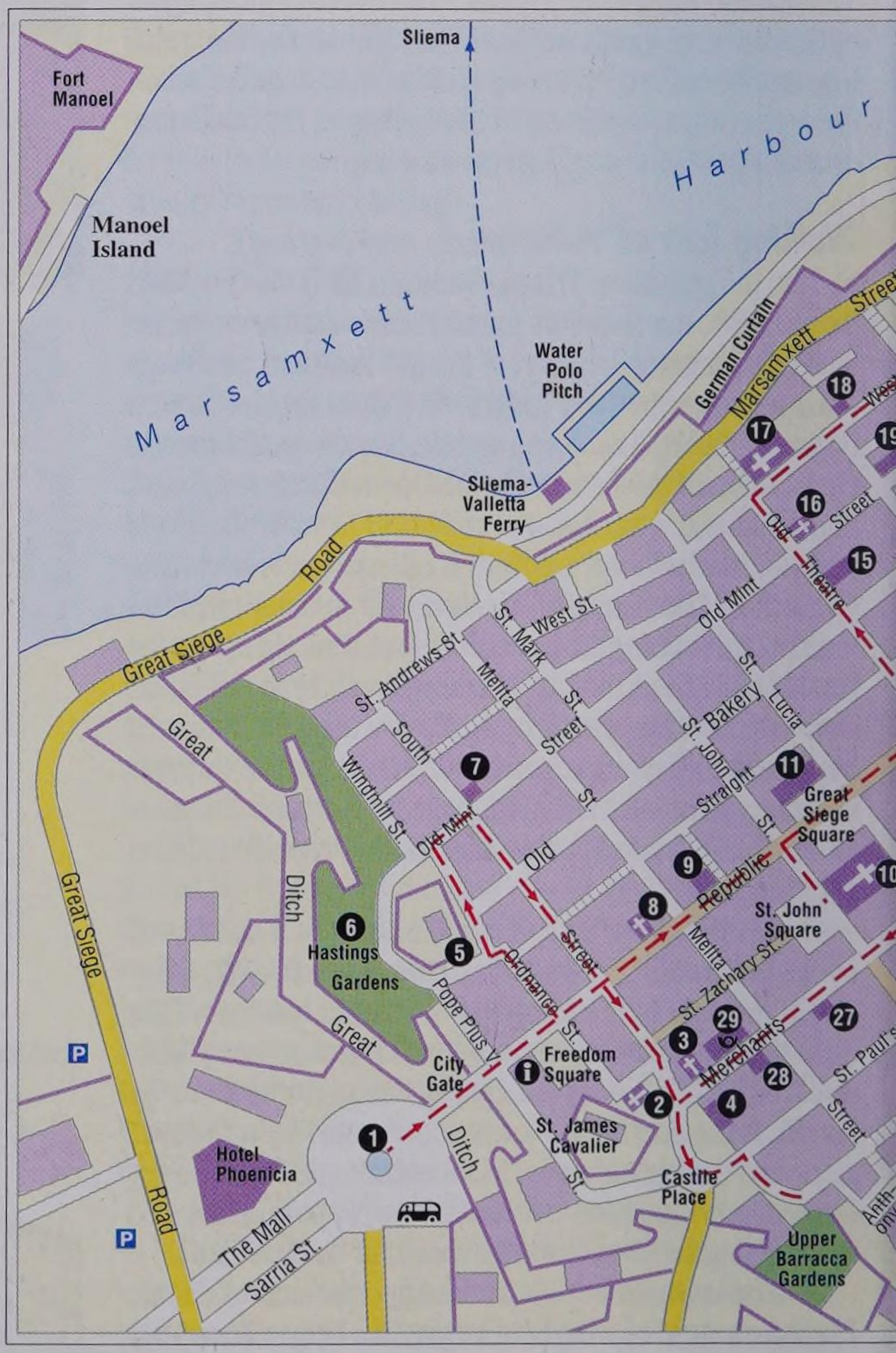
View of Grand Habour



Gardens open to the eastern corner of the square; there is a superb view of Grand Harbour and the bastions out in front of it from the observation terrace here. The poetic names of the various plants will interest those keen on botany; the more prosaically-minded can sniff the jasmine and go off for a drink in the cafeteria, which is housed inside an attractive pavilion. The statues in the gardens include a bust of Sir Winston Churchill, a monument to Lord Strickland, prime minister from 1927–30, and the tomb of Sir Thomas Maitland, the governor of Malta (and Corfu) from 1813 to 1824.

Close by, along the bottom of the ditch in Lascaris Bastion, the **War Rooms** (Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9am–12.30pm) have been preserved; uniformed models plot air battles and the position of convoys.

Back in Freedom Square, go down Ordnance Street to **St John's Cavalier** ❺, where the Knights now have their

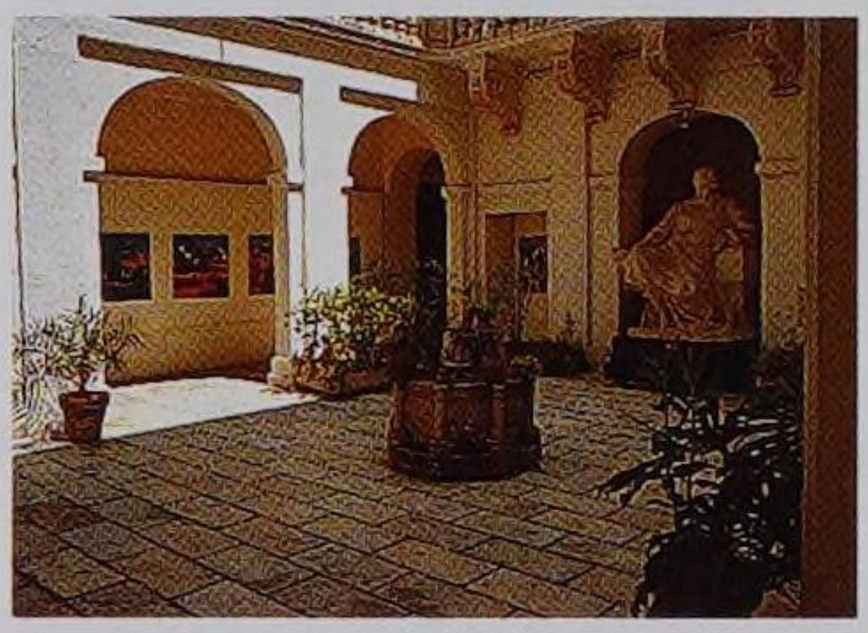


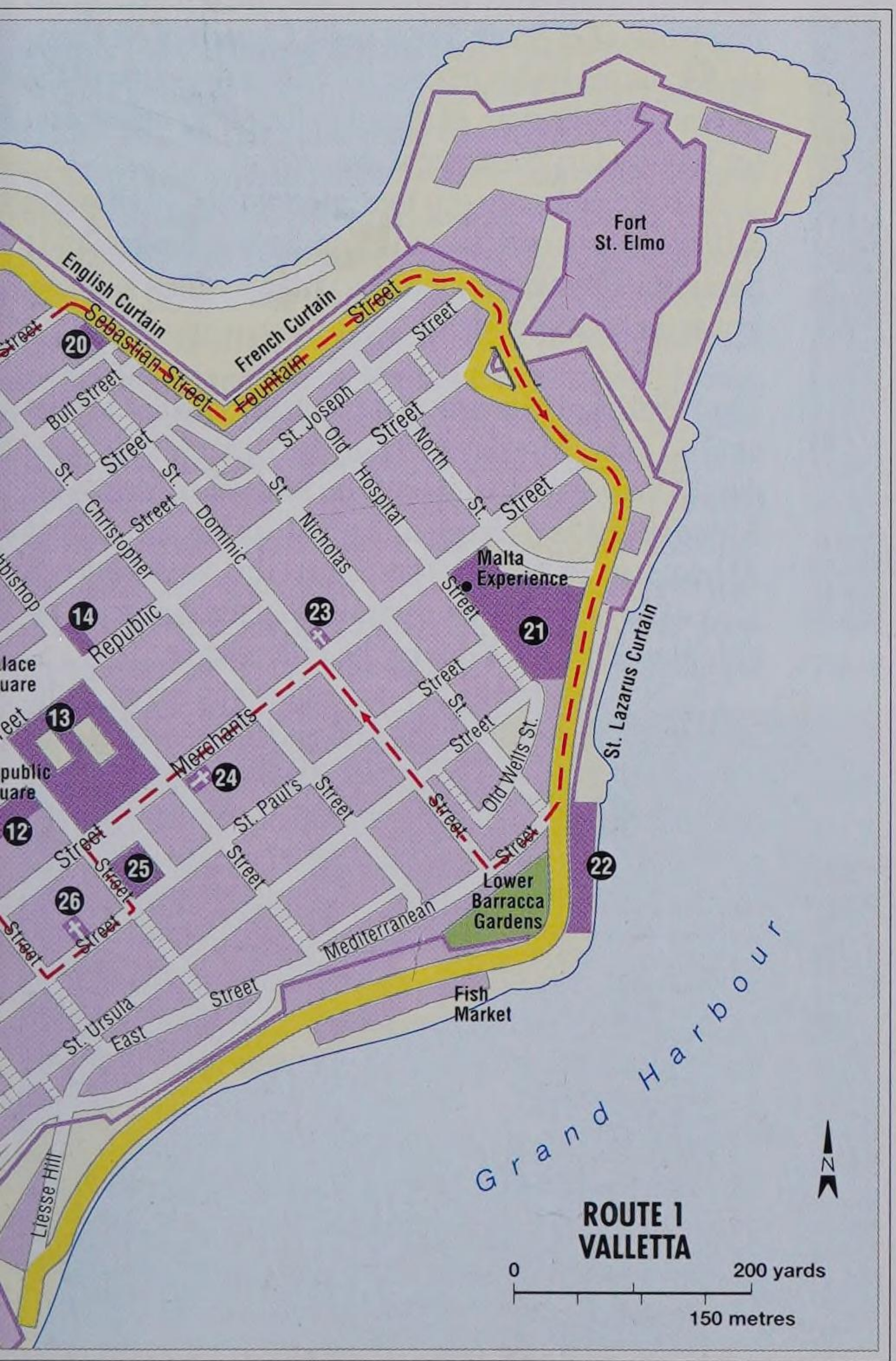
embassy in Malta, and then on to **Hastings Gardens** ❻, named after the Marquis of Hastings, governor of Malta from 1824–6. There's a fine panorama from up here of Marsamxett Harbour, with Manoel Island and Sliema in the background. Note the impressive thickness of the walls. Old Mint Street, one of the streets that seem to lead straight off into the wild blue yonder, is just a few steps away.

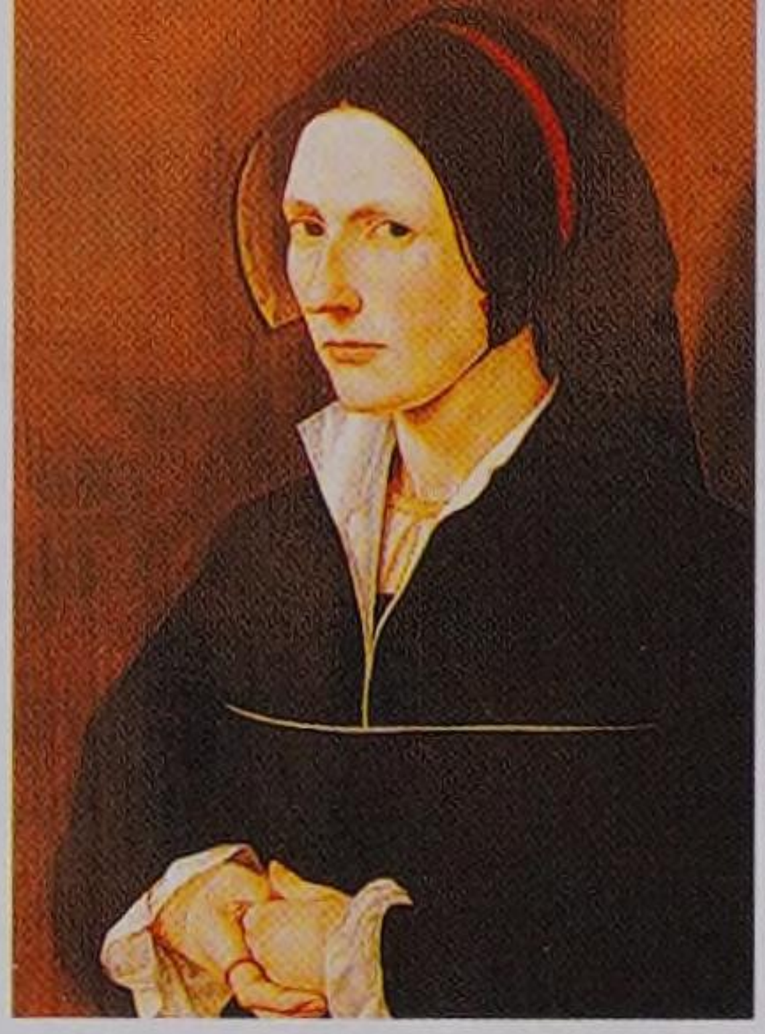
At the junction with South Street is an attractive white palace built in 1733 which houses the **National Museum of Fine Arts** ❼ (1 October until 15 June Monday to Saturday 8.15am–5pm, Sunday 8.15am–4pm; 15 June until 30 September Monday to Saturday 7.45am–2pm). It used to be Admiralty House, and was the official residence of the commander-in-chief of the British Mediterranean fleet.

The first floor of the museum features Italian painting of the 14th and 15th centuries (Florence and Tuscany) and

Courtyard of the National Museum of Fine Arts

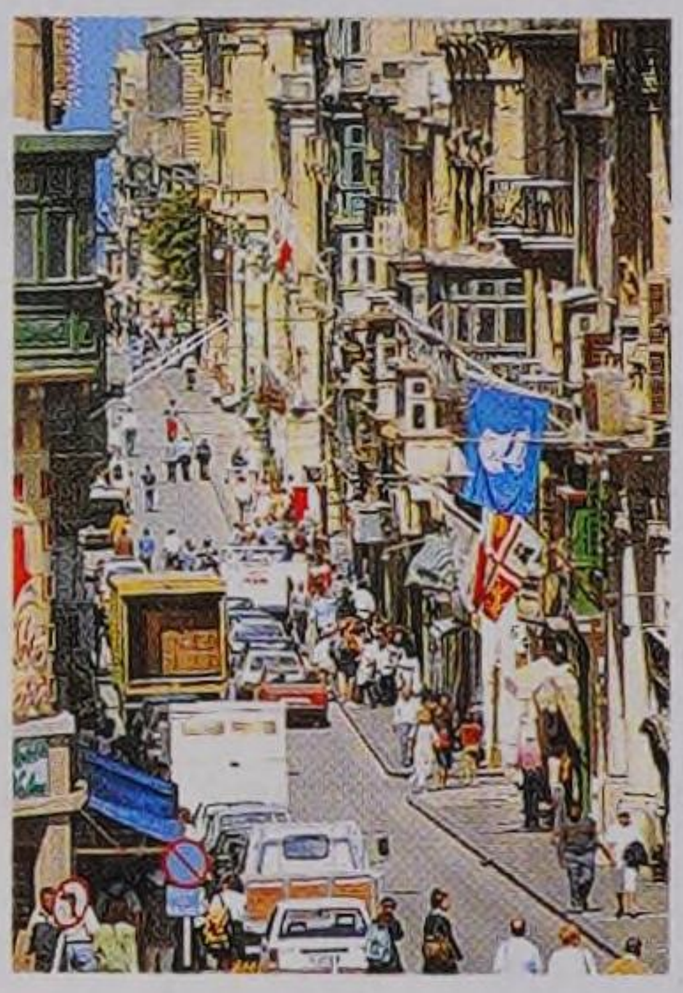






Portrait of a Lady

Republic Street



the 16th and 17th centuries; sculptures and bronzes by the Maltese sculptor Antonio Sciortino (1883–1947); and paintings by Mattia Preti (1613–99). On the ground floor there are several works by the artists Antoine de Favray, who worked for the Order on Malta from 1744–88, and Louis du Cros; their paintings are mainly of documentary value, but they successfully capture the flavour of Valletta's past greatness. On the basement level there is an exhibition of various utensils and surgical instruments that documents the exemplary medical care given at the Order's hospital, the Sacra Infirmeria (the Holy Infirmary); the famous **silver plate**, which was used to serve the patients their food on, is also on display.

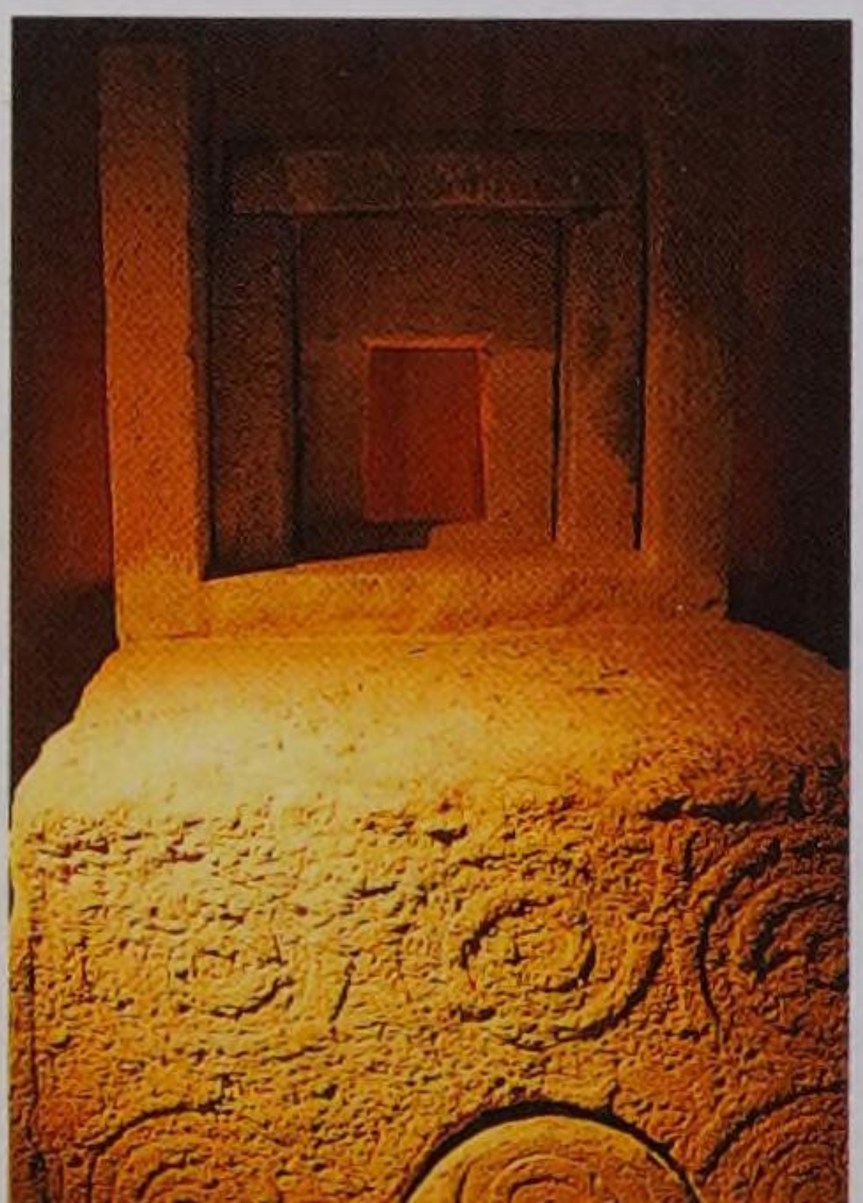
Valletta is divided into two sections by **Republic Street**. The section leading as far as Palace Square, where the Grand Master's Palace stands, is full of shops; all this business activity stops abruptly, however, as the street descends towards the end of the peninsula and Fort St Elmo. In the first block after South Street is the **Church of St Francis** ❽; its overladen interior contains a depiction of the Legend of St Francis, executed in the rather unsuccessful 19th-century Nazarene style.

At 24 Republic Street is the Café Spinella – well worth calling in for a snack – and two houses further on is **Sapienza's Bookshop**, the best in town with a vast collection of books on Malta.

The ★ **National Museum of Archaeology** ❾ (1 October until 15 June, Monday to Saturday 8.15am–5pm, Sunday 8.15am–4pm; 16 June until 30 September, Monday to Saturday 7.45am–2pm) is housed inside the former Auberge de Provence. The palace was built between 1571–75 by Gerolamo Cassar; its Renaissance-style facade was added later, during the 17th century.

The National Museum's collection was begun in the 17th and 18th centuries before being reorganised in the 20th century by the great Maltese archaeologist, Sir Themistocles Zammit, and was finally brought here in 1957. The museum has recently undergone extensive renovations and alterations, and when the first floor is reopened in 1999, all Malta's most important Neolithic, Punic and Roman finds, as well as several items imported by Greeks and Etruscans will once again be on view. On top of that, there will be displays covering the Arab and Byzantine epochs.

Stone slabs in the National Museum



Meanwhile, on the ground floor, the most striking exhibits are the monumental stone slabs with their spiral and 'pitted' patterns, which were taken from the island's prehistoric temples. Fascinating, too, are the miniature models showing what these megalithic temple complexes must originally have looked like; the numerous terracotta fig-

urines and statues; the reliefs depicting animals carved on stone which were also discovered in the prehistoric temple complexes; and the statuettes representing fertility goddesses. Especially worth seeing are the Neolithic sculptures, including the famous ★ ***Sleeping Lady*** that was discovered in the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum (*see pages 55–6*); the statuette, which is 13cm (5 inches) long, is that of a priestess.

The second floor is mostly devoted to the Carthaginian epoch, which lasted from the 6th century BC until well into Roman times. The finds here come from Punic tombs cut into the rock and include a Punic sarcophagus dating from the 5th century BC.

In the beautifully restored Great Hall is an exhibition devoted to the history of Valletta.

Venus of Malta

The next cross-street is called St John's Street. It broadens out into St John's Square, which is dominated by ★★ **St John's Co-Cathedral ⓾**, the Order's former church.

This building is the masterpiece of Gerolamo Cassar (1520–86), and was constructed in 1573–7. The facade is rather plain, with its pillared portico, balcony and triangular gable framed by two bell towers. Consecrated to St John the Baptist, this was the church of the Knights Hospitallers. In 1816, it was elevated by Pope Pius VII to the status of a cathedral, to make it equal in rank with the archbishop's cathedral in Malta's former capital, Mdina.

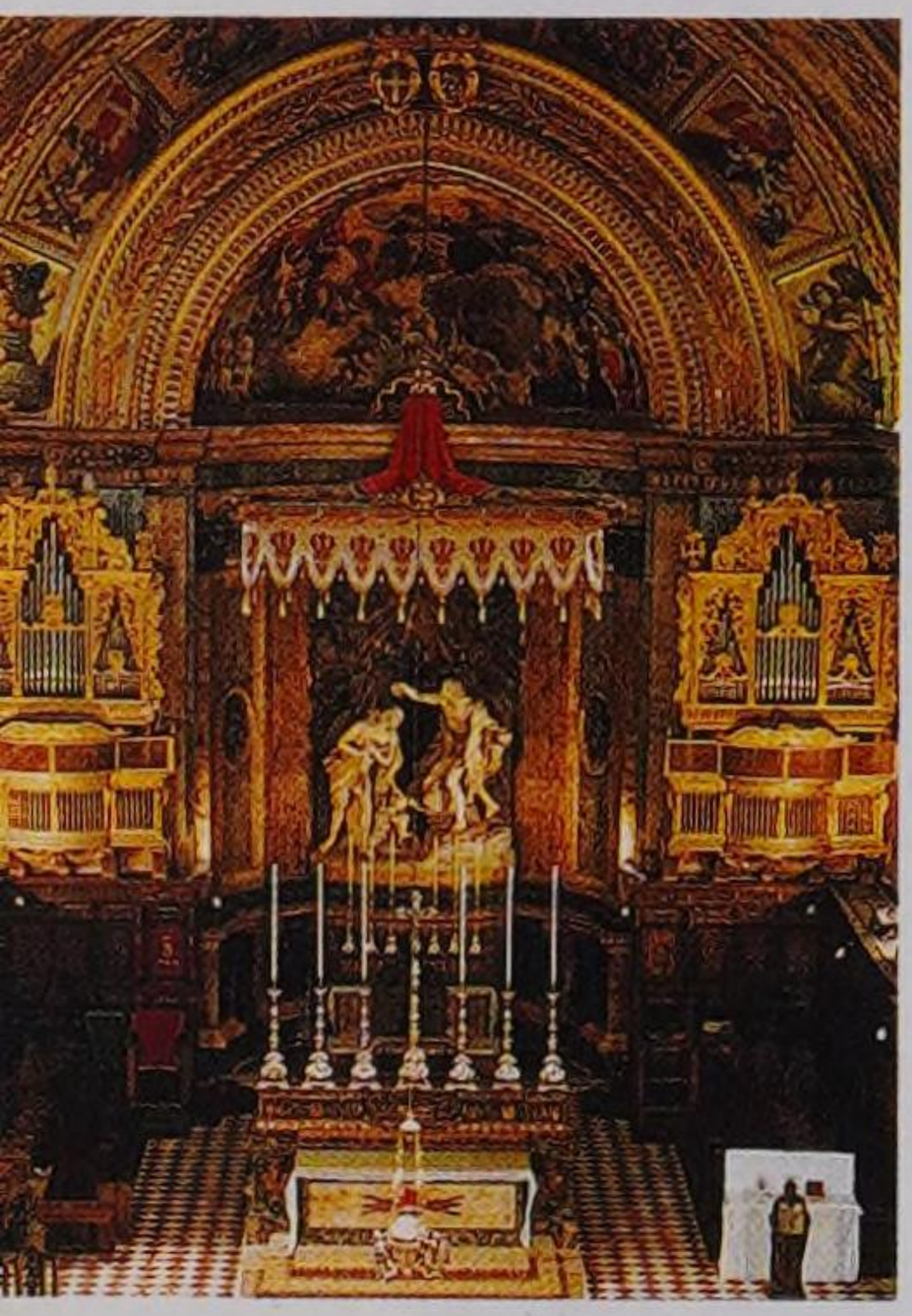
The interior comes as quite a surprise after the plain facade: the enormous barrel vault is 58m (190ft) long, 20m (64ft) high and 35m (115ft) wide, and flanked by chapels surmounted by oval windows. Warm gold tones dominate the space, and every inch of the walls and ceiling is decorated. The Knights of St John lie buried beneath the polychrome marble tomb-slabs set into the ★ **pavement**, and

The plain facade of St John's

The richly-decorated interior

Marble tomb slabs

The high altar and organ cases



figures can be seen alongside the various heraldic crests and inscriptions. There are 400 sepulchral slabs in the church altogether, and they represent nearly every major family from the European nobility.

The interior decoration of the Co-Cathedral was completed in the 17th and 18th centuries, during which the presbytery received particular attention: the apse, designed by the Maltese architect Lorenzo Gafà (1630–1704), contains two golden organ cases and the fresco in the semi-dome looks down on the magnificent high altar whose colossal marble group of the *Baptism of Christ* is the work of the great Sicilian sculptor, Giuseppe Mazzuoli (1644–1725).

The chapels along either side of the nave represent the various *langues* of the Knights of St John. The chapel walls are decorated with coats-of-arms, heraldic embellishments and floral patterns, and each chapel is lent its own distinctive character by its altars and sepulchral slabs. The fourth chapel in the right-hand side-aisle was given two particularly magnificent tombs: those of Grand Master Cotoner (Spanish, late 17th-century) and Grand Master Ramón Perellos y Rocaful (1697–1720). The fifth chapel on the right has some striking 'barley-sugar' columns, a popular motif in Maltese churches. The Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament next door is closed off by a valuable screen in solid silver – when Napoleon's soldiers disembarked here in 1798 to go on a pillaging spree, the quick-witted Maltese painted the screen black and thus saved it.

The first chapel on the left-hand side gives access to the sacristy, where religious implements and paintings can be seen; and the fourth chapel on the left contains the portrait bust of Grand Master Adrien de Wignacourt (1690–97), who built the famous aqueduct on the island that is named after him (*see page 52*).

In the sixth chapel, a stairway leads down to the **crypt**, which contains the sarcophagi of the first 12 grand masters of Malta. Opposite the entrance is the tomb of Grand Master Philippe Villiers de L'Isle Adam (1530–34), who was forced to suffer defeat at Rhodes and was the first grand master on Malta. Next to him lies Jean Parisot de la Valette (1557–68), who successfully defended the Order's new base against the Turkish siege of 1565, and began the construction of the city that is named after him. The founder of the church, Jean L'Evêque de la Cassière (1572–81), also lies buried in the crypt here.

The ★ **paintings** on the barrel vault can best be admired from the nave. They are the masterpiece of the Calabrian artist Mattia Preti (1613–99), who lived and worked on Malta until his death, after several years of travelling through Flanders and Northern Italy. He also founded a school of painting on the island. The magnificent paint-

ings in the vault depict scenes from the life of St John the Baptist. The vault is made of Maltese limestone, which after being quarried has a habit of growing rock-hard on prolonged exposure to air, making further processing impossible. For direct painting with oils, the entire surface of the stone had to be moistened with linseed oil, and it was on this base that Mattia Preti and his apprentices executed the cycle of paintings here. His style betrays his familiarity with the 16th-century Venetian painters Titian and Veronese. Preti's achievement lies not in the way he carried out the task set him so much as in his convincing artistic solution to numerous questions of detail that arose from the Order's commission: additions ranging from special themes and groups of figures to still lives and domestic pets all had to be included in the work as a whole, and the paintings are a real delight for lovers of detail.

The first chapel on the right contains the entrance to the ★ **Cathedral Museum** (Monday to Friday 9.30am–1pm and 1.30–4.30pm, Saturday 9.30am–1pm). Fourteen fine **Flemish tapestries** hang here, woven to designs by Peter Paul Rubens and André Poussin. They are placed on display in the cathedral during June (the festival month of St John the Baptist). The **oratory** (1603) contains devotional items, paintings by Preti and Antoine de Favray (1706–98), a French artist who arrived on Malta in 1744, as well as ★ ***The Beheading of St John the Baptist***, a true masterpiece of Italian Renaissance painting by Michelangelo da Caravaggio (1573–1610).

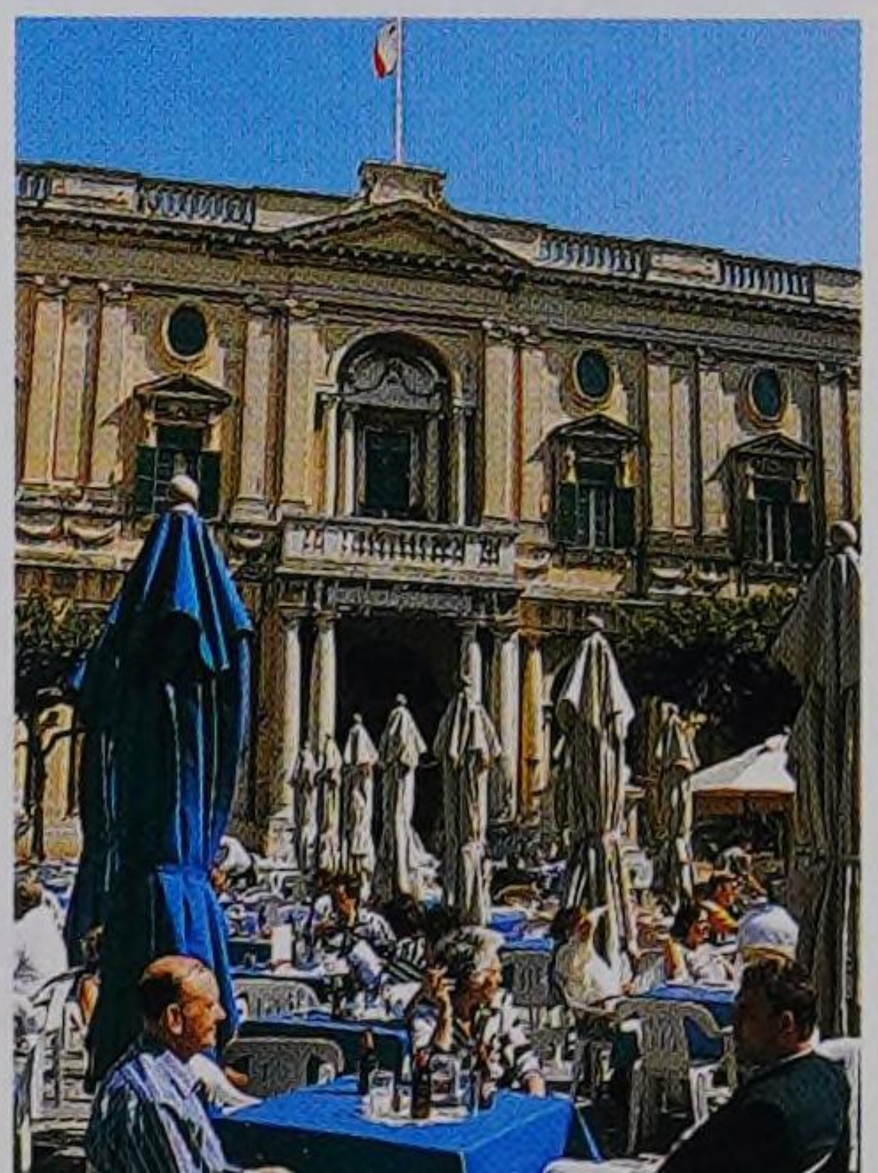
The hot-headed Caravaggio came to Malta for a short period in 1608, on the run from the authorities after having murdered a man. He was received into the Order as a Knight of Justice, but was expelled from Malta soon afterwards, either because news of his crime had reached the island or because of new misdeeds. His painting style is famous for its selective illumination of form out of deep shadow; this technique, known as tenebrism, was revolutionary at the time and was to exert a major influence on baroque painting.

Republic Street leads into Great Siege Square, the forum for the neoclassical temple-like facade of the **Law Courts** ⓫. The next square, Republic Square, is a good place to stop for a rest and a snack at one of the various cafés here on a hot Maltese day. The square is dominated by the facade of the **National Malta Library** ⓬ (Monday to Saturday 9am–1pm, in winter also 4–7pm; closed Wednesday), housed inside a neoclassical palace dating from 1796. It contains 61,000 books, 50 incunabula, 1,250 manuscripts, the records of the *Università* (*see page 40*), and the entire archive of the Knights of St John from the 12th century onwards (6,524 volumes of manuscripts).

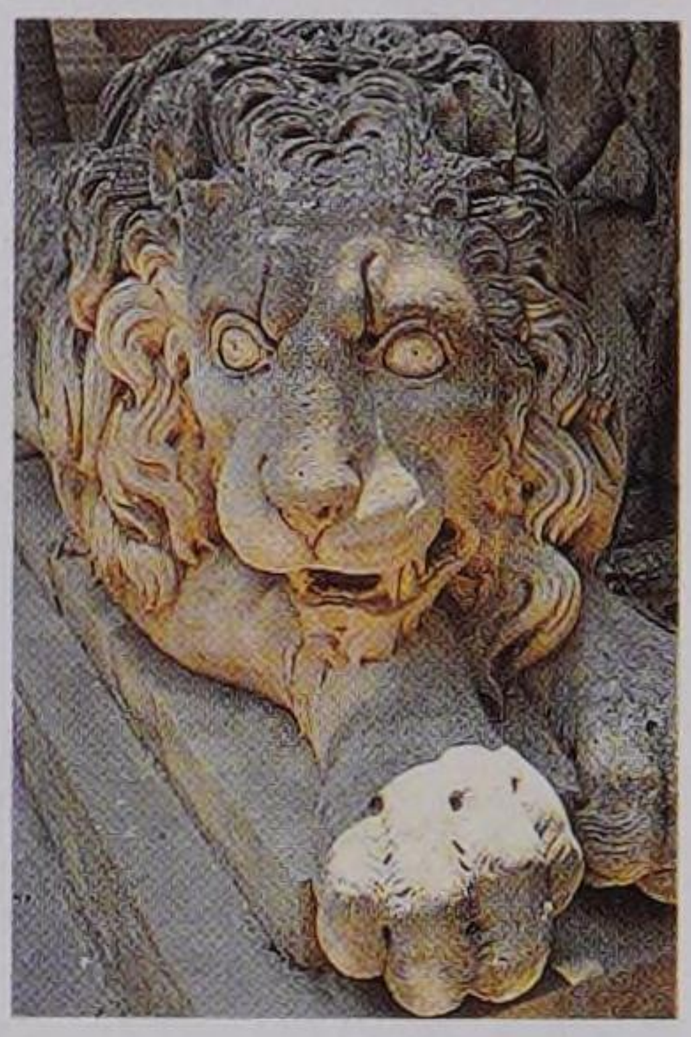
Flemish tapestry

Beheading of St John the Baptist

Relaxing in Republic Square



Lion at Grand Master's Palace



Neptune's Court

Armoury exhibit

An archway connects the Malta Library with a building that is both the residence of the President of the Republic of Malta and the seat of the House of Representatives: the **Grand Master's Palace** ⓭. It takes up the whole block between Republic Street and Merchants Street, and was built in 1571–4 by Gerolamo Cassar, the architect of St John's Co-Cathedral. The rectangular windows are characteristic of the architecture of that period: the Turkish threat had still not been banished, and the Knights were more interested in the practicalities of defence than in decoration. The large, green-painted balconies that surround the first floor are a distinctive feature of Maltese architecture, and their consoles merit closer inspection. The facade on Palace Square harmonises with the single-storey building opposite; it once accommodated the grand master's bodyguard, and today houses the Libyan Cultural Institute.

Pinto Gate leads inside the Grand Master's Palace, to Prince Alfred's Court; the fine specimens of subtropical vegetation here almost make it a botanical garden in its own right. On the right at the back, two stone lions can be seen standing guard, and on the clock-tower figures in Turkish dress strike the hours. Some steps lead down into the second inner courtyard, Neptune's Court; the bronze statue of the sea-god with the trident formerly stood near the fish market in Grand Harbour.

On the other side is the entrance to the **Palace Armoury** (1 October until 15 June Monday to Saturday 8am–5pm, Sunday 8am–2pm; 16 June until 30 September Monday to Saturday 8am–2pm, Thursday and Friday until 4pm). Two long halls to the left and the right of the entrance hall contain all kinds of military equipment from the days of the Knights: suits of mail, cannon, guns, halberds, lances, shields, banners, flags, captured Turkish swords, military drums and a coach. There's also a gold-inlaid ceremonial suit that was made especially for Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt.

The grand masters' State Rooms on the first floor can either be reached via the large marble staircase from Neptune's Court, or a small tradesman's stairway from the Palm Court – the palace is still used for state functions and so several parts of the building may be closed to visitors at short notice. Enter the corridor which leads around Neptune's Court: it provides access to the State Rooms. The corridor is lined with portraits of the grand masters and also several historic suits of armour; frescoes under the ceiling illustrate glorious exploits in the history of the Order.

The Maltese Parliament used to sit in the **Tapestry Chamber** before the House of Representatives was built at the rear of the building; under the Knights the chamber

was a place of assembly. Today it is named after the magnificent collection of French tapestries (1700) based on the theme of fantastic animal and hunting scenes from the tropical regions of the New World. All around the room, scenes illustrating the Order's sea battles can be admired below the painted coffered ceiling. All that remains of the grand masters' **Dining Room** is the long, polished wooden table; the rest of the room was destroyed during a bombing attack in World War II and had to be reconstructed. Large portraits of British monarchs hang on the walls.

The **Great Council** or **Yellow State Room** (1 October until 15 June Monday to Saturday 8am–5pm, Sunday 8am–2pm; 16 June until 30 September Monday to Saturday 8am–2pm, Thursday and Friday until 4pm) is named after its yellow brocade hangings, and the familiar spiral pillars mark the raised podium where the grand master used to sit. On the opposite side of the room is a gilt ★ **balcony** hewn from the wood of the galleon that brought the Knights of St John to Malta when they escaped from Rhodes. The panels on the parapet illustrate the *Expulsion from Paradise* in fine detail, in this case almost certainly a reference to Rhodes. Above the balcony the insignia of Grand Master Jean Parisot de la Valette (1557–68) can be seen. The ★ **frescoes** on the outer wall show scenes from the Great Siege of 1565. At the very beginning Valletta can be seen 'without Valletta': the Sceberra Peninsula during the siege. The only building on it is Fort St Elmo at the very end. After the Ottomans were successfully repelled from the peninsula, the new capital of Valletta was built.

The Great Council chamber was used as a ballroom during British rule.

An interesting detour at this stage is to the **Casa Rocca Piccola** (conducted tours Monday to Saturday 10am, 11am, noon and 1pm), a small palace two blocks up Republic Street from the Grand Master's Palace. One of the oldest buildings in Valletta, it has withstood the ravages of time extremely well; today, it is still inhabited by its original patrician family – and is open to visitors. The owners are quite happy to allow the public a glimpse into their everyday domestic life, providing a unique opportunity to get a first-hand impression of the interior of an authentic Maltese patrician's house.

The impressively proportioned **Palazzo Verdelin** ⓮ (Monday to Friday hourly from 10am–3pm; Saturday, Sunday and public holidays 10am, 11am and noon) marks the boundary between Palace Square and the peninsula; stylistically it forms a flamboyant contrast to the severity of the Grand Master's Palace. Inside things get more serious however: here the heroic defence of Malta during World War II, which won the islanders the George

Maltese insignia
Scenes of heroism

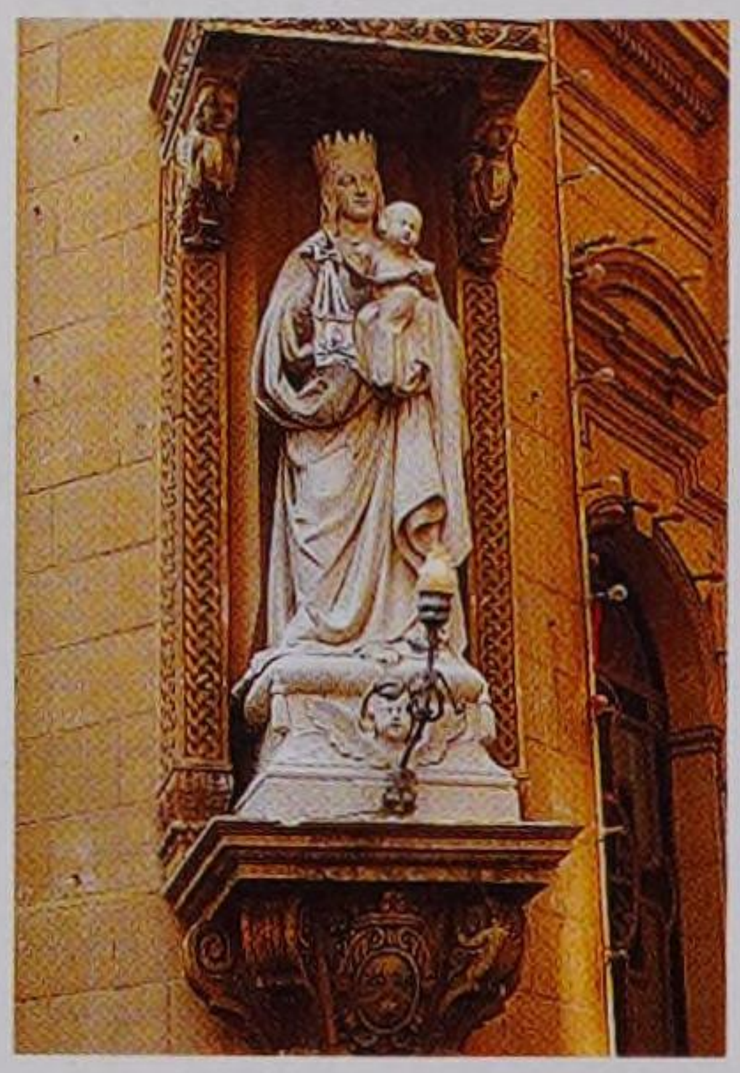
Palazzo Verdelin

Cross (still visible today in the white area of the red-and-white national flag), is documented by means of authentic film material.

Old Theatre Street branches off Palace Square opposite the Palazzo Verdelin; the café on the left-hand side of the street is called 'The Perfection', and testing out the proposition is a good idea at this point. At the junction with Old Bakery Street is the ★★ **Manoel Theatre** ⓯ (conducted tours Monday to Friday 10.45am and 11.30am, Saturday 11.30am, ask at box office) whose modest exterior belies the fact that it has one of the oldest theatre interiors in Europe. It was built in 1731 by the Portuguese grand master Manoel de Vilhena (1722–36), and endured a period of decay after the larger Opera House was opened. At one point it actually became a flophouse, and was then turned into a cheap cinema. Most of the painted and gilded boxes inside still retain their original splendour.

Just after the intersection with Old Mint Street is the domed **Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel** ⓰, a good example of the Maltese fondness for preserving historical forms in architecture. Cassar's previous Carmelite church (1570) was destroyed during World War II, and the dimensions of the new building, completed in 1958, changed the appearance of the city.

Our Lady of Carmel



Beyond West Street, Old Theatre Street turns into a flight of steps. There's a fantastic view from here of a whole mass of balconies, the church and the blue water, all of it framed by the silhouette of Sliema opposite.

The neo-Gothic steeple of **St Paul's Anglican Cathedral** ⓱ is another famous landmark of the city; the church was built in 1844 at the expense of the dowager Queen Adelaide, the widow of William IV. A memorial in the square outside the church commemorates the uprising against French occupation in 1799.

Carmelite Church and St Paul's Cathedral

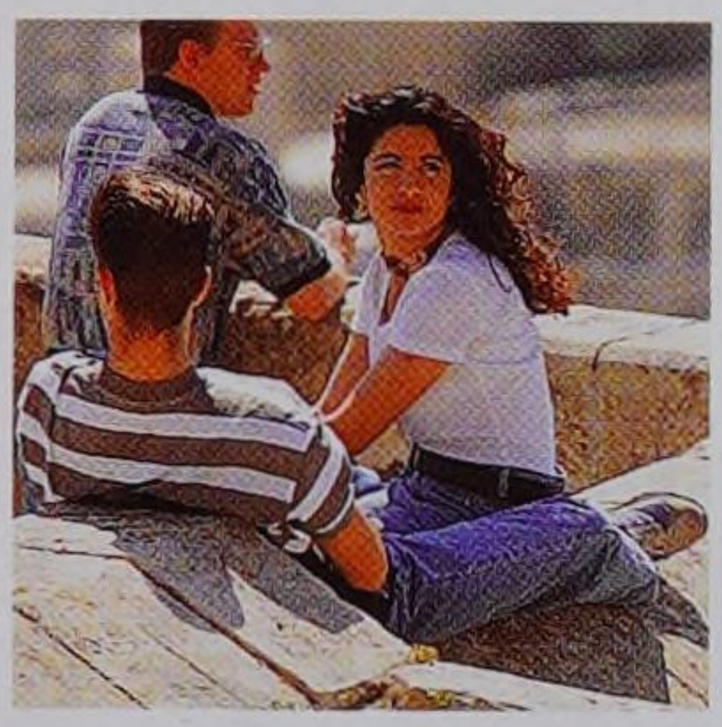
The church facade overshadows the much humbler piece of architecture opposite: designed by Gerolamo Cassar, the **Auberge d'Aragon** ⓲ is a good example of early Order architecture; its sparing use of window decoration is reminiscent of the Grand Master's Palace. The rooms are grouped around a leafy inner courtyard, where wooden roof-beams and round arches are the dominant architectural features. Its neoclassical portico aside, this palace is the only one in Valletta to have remained completely unaltered since the 16th century.

Auberge d'Aragon

Archbishop Street leads back towards the city centre, and a short distance along it is the **Archbishop's Palace** ⓳, which started out in 1624 as a very harmonious baroque structure until someone decided to alter its portico with a weak imitation in 1952.

Walk down West Street now and admire all the amazing variations of balcony on the facades. West Street ends up beside the **Auberge d'Angleterre et de Bavière** ⓴, which faces the 'English Curtain' wall formerly defended by the English Knights. The English Curtain is followed by the French Curtain, and there's a good view from the latter across St Elmo Bay to Fort Tigné opposite.

Fort St Elmo and visitors to the battlements



At the end of the battlements is **Fort St Elmo**, one of the largest forts in Valletta, and built to protect the harbour entrance. Constructed during the Spanish occupation of Malta, it was here before the Knights of St John arrived, but after suffering fierce bombardment at the hands of the Turks for a full 31 days during the Great Siege of 1565 it had to be entirely rebuilt. Near the main entrance is the **National War Museum** (1 October until 15 June, Monday to Saturday 8.15am–5pm, Sunday 8.15am–4pm; 16 June until 30 September, Monday to Saturday 7.45am–2pm). Most of the items on display here document the island's brave resistance during World War II. The George Cross, conferred on Malta for courage under bombardment in 1942, is the most treasured exhibit. Otherwise the fort serves as the Police Academy and can only be visited at weekends (Saturday 1–5pm, Sunday 9am–5pm). Once a month it is the scene of the Guardia Parades, which bring to life the days of the Knights.

Opposite Fort St Elmo on the Grand Harbour side is the Knights' old hospital, the **Sacra Infirmeria** ㉑, formerly one of the largest and best hospitals in Europe. The patients here, even those from outside the Order, were allowed to eat from silver plate, and the hospital also cared for the insane, and for destitute and illegitimate children. When they arrived on Malta, the French ejected the patients and melted down the silver plate to help pay for the Egyptian campaign, though some still survives and is on display at Valletta's National Museum of Fine Arts (*see page 21*). The Great Ward of the hospital was a mag-

nificent 154-m (505-ft) long vaulted hall; it has now been restored and is part of the **Mediterranean Conference Centre** (Monday to Friday 9.30am–4pm).

The entrance to the multivision spectacular **The Malta Experience**, a fascinating way to learn about Malta's history, is on Old Hospital Street (Monday to Friday hourly 11am–4pm, Saturday and Sunday 11am–1pm).

It's only a short distance from here to the **Lower Barracca Gardens**, which occupy part of the Castile Bastion. They're a good place to wind down with a drink, sit back and enjoy the smell of jasmine. The neoclassical Doric temple is a memorial to Alexander Ball, the first British governor of Malta. Next to the gardens there's a more modern Maltese memorial, the **Siege Bell** ㉒, commemorating the conferral of the George Cross on the island; unfortunately it rather gets in the way of the view.

Sleepy St Dominic Street leads back from Lower Barracca Gardens towards the city centre. At the junction with Merchants Street, the **Church of St Dominic** ㉓ is just a few yards off to the right. Its Sicilian Baroque ★ **facade** is unusual for Valletta.

Church of St Dominic

The city's old university quarter begins at the next cross-street, Christopher Street. It started when a Jesuit college was founded here in 1592; 200 years later the institution was granted a university charter. Integrated into the complex, which today houses a foundation for international studies, is the **Gesù** ㉔, the city's Jesuit church. It was built by Francesco Buonamici, who based his designs on the building of the same name in Rome. The foundation stone was laid in 1595, but construction work continued throughout the 17th century, and the two-storey early baroque facade still appears incomplete even today. The three-aisled interior with its dome contains a disproportionately large number of spiral columns; at the main altar they surround Mattia Preti's *Liberation of St Peter*.

Church of St Paul Shipwrecked

Merchants Street passes the rear of the Grand Master's Palace, which is every bit as severe-looking as the front. Opposite is Valletta's **Covered Market** ㉕. This section of Merchants Street, with its various stands and stalls, remains much the same as far as St John Street, which connects with the square in front of the Co-Cathedral. It's almost impossible to get through here on weekdays; one alternative is to go round the block via St Paul's Street and visit the **Church of St Paul Shipwrecked** ㉖. The baroque facade with its two towers is a good example of average Maltese Baroque; the whole edifice is a bit narrow, probably due to reasons of space. The ornate interior contains a painting of the saint's famous shipwreck by the exiled Italian artist Filippo Paladini (1544–1614), who was a member of Andrea del Sarto's workshop in Flo-

rence. The church's treasures include a statue of St Paul by Melchiorre Gafà, a wristbone of the saint, and half of the column on which he was beheaded in Rome.

Outside the church, opposite its main portal, there's a very good cake shop. Try the famous Maltese *pastizzi*, puff-pastry cases with all sorts of fillings ranging from sweet to spicy. While queuing, you'll realise that the balconies up above certainly merit closer inspection. The entire upper section of St Paul's Street with its narrow lanes, tall houses and all kinds of balconies, gives a good impression of what Malta's capital must have looked like in former times.

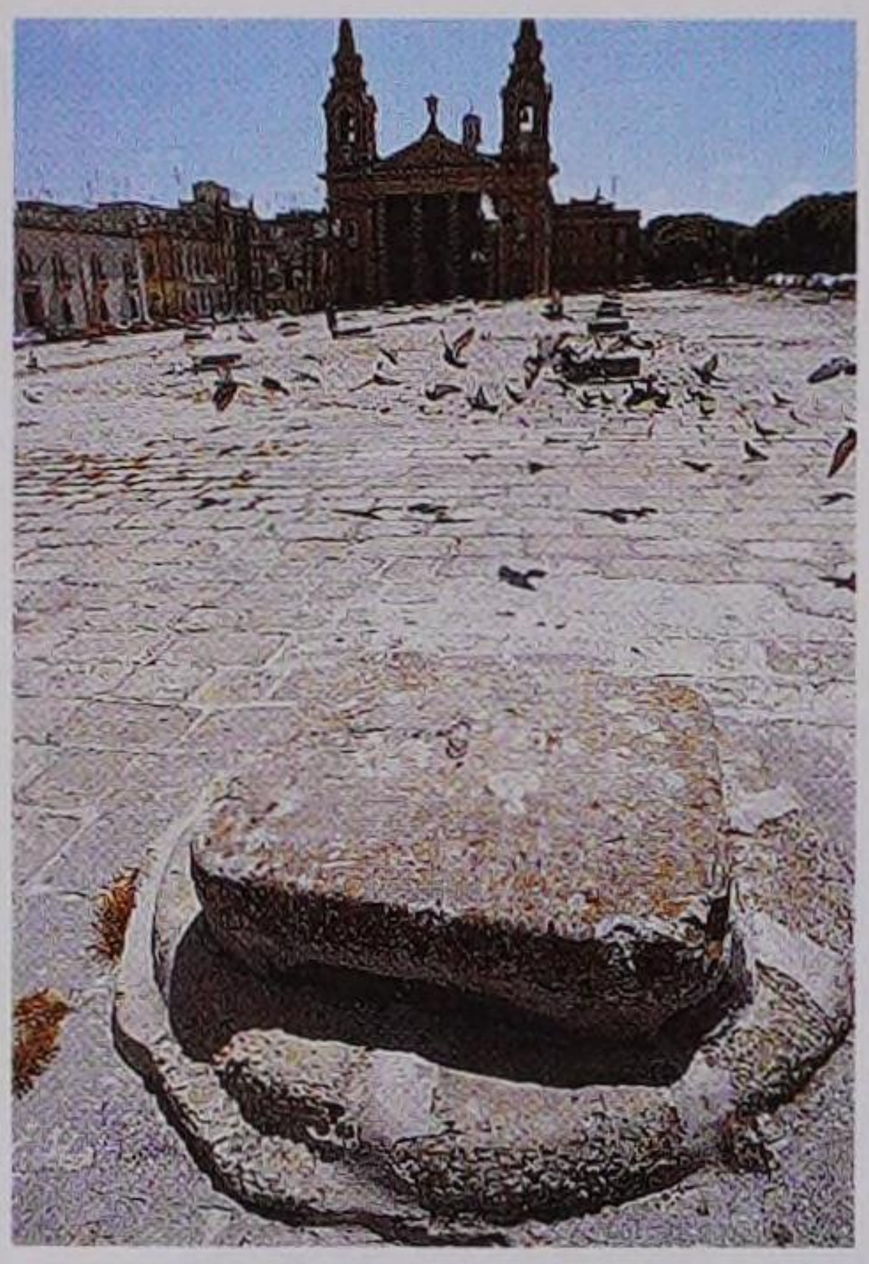
The side-exit of the church leads into Merchants Street again. Cross St John Street now; on the left-hand side of the road is the **Castellania** ㉗, the Knights' law courts, today occupied by the Department of Public Health. It was built in 1758 and has a harmonious facade. The numerous decorative half-moons around the portal area are references to the coat-of-arms of Castile; Ferdinand and Isabella had liberated Spain from the Moors in 1492, and they adopted the half-moon emblem from then on.

Merchants Street rises gradually to the highest point in the city, Castile Square. To the left is the proud **Palazzo Parisio** ㉘, which dates from the 18th century and has a severe-looking three-storey neoclassical facade. Napoleon spent a few days here in 1798 on his way to Egypt; today it's the home of the Ministry of Commonwealth and Foreign Affairs.

Opposite is the General Post Office, housed inside the former **Auberge d'Italie** ㉙. This building was begun in 1574; the rusticated portal, which bears the effigy and inscription of Italian grand master Gregorio Carafa (1680–90), dates from the 17th century.

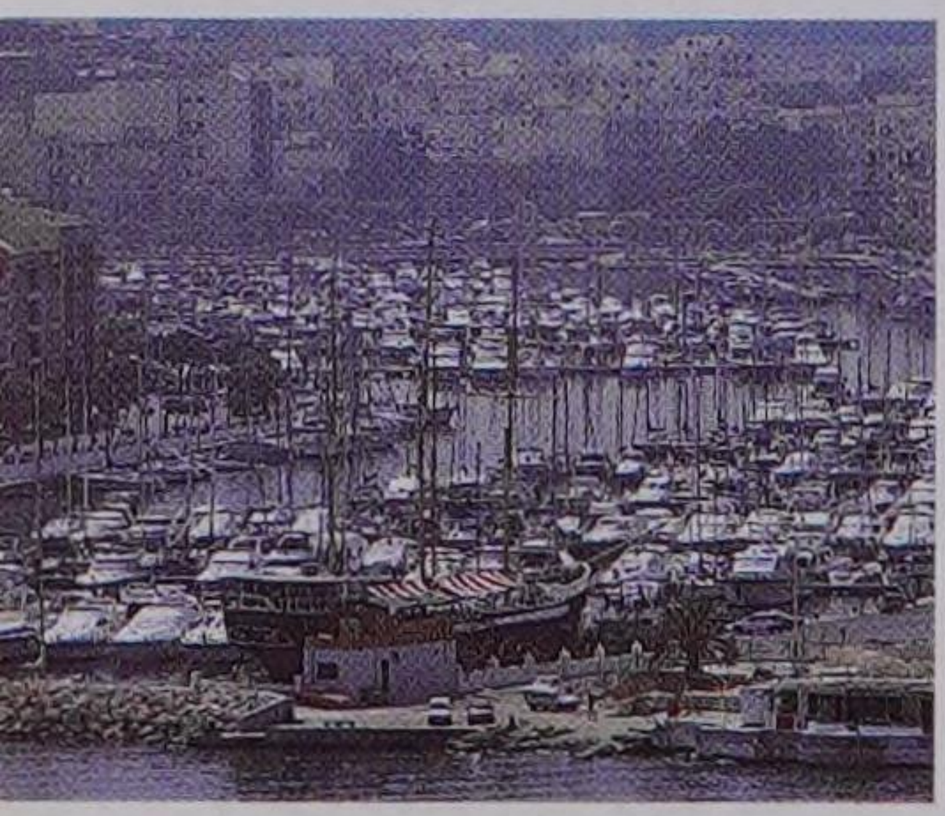
Discussing events

Typical balconies



A granary lid

Take a harbour cruise



The 'Black Pearl'

Floriana

Valletta's spacious suburb extension, Floriana, with its chessboard-like grid of streets, was originally laid out in order to defend the city from the landward side. The Italian architect Pietro Floriani was entrusted with building the fortifications in 1634, and the town that subsequently grew up here still bears his name. The Triton Fountain, where the bus station is today, was formerly the crown of the fortifications.

Coming from City Gate, the shady avenue known as The Mall, with the Phoenicia Hotel, leads off to the right. It comes out into the large square in front of the **Church of St Publius**. This church is consecrated to the Roman governor who, legend has it, was converted by St Paul after the saint cured his father of a serious illness, and who then went on to become the first bishop of Malta. The many round slabs of stone in the square served as lids for subterranean granaries, which contained the provisions imported by the Knights of St John.

Some very attractive parks and gardens have been laid out on the bastions here, and are ideal for short strolls with views across the fortifications and the harbour; they include the Sa Maison Gardens, St Philip Gardens and the Argotti Botanical Gardens. The latter contain a fine collection of exotic plants, all indigenous to the islands.

Harbour Cruise

One very good way of getting an overall impression of Valletta is to admire it from the water by going on a harbour cruise. This view of one of the finest natural harbours in the world and its fortifications is an unforgettable part of any Malta visit. Several different firms do the 90-minute-long cruise around Marsamxett Harbour and the docks in Grand Harbour. Departures tend to be hourly (depending on the season) from The Strand in Sliema. Unless it's the height of summer, bring along a jacket because it can get very windy on board.

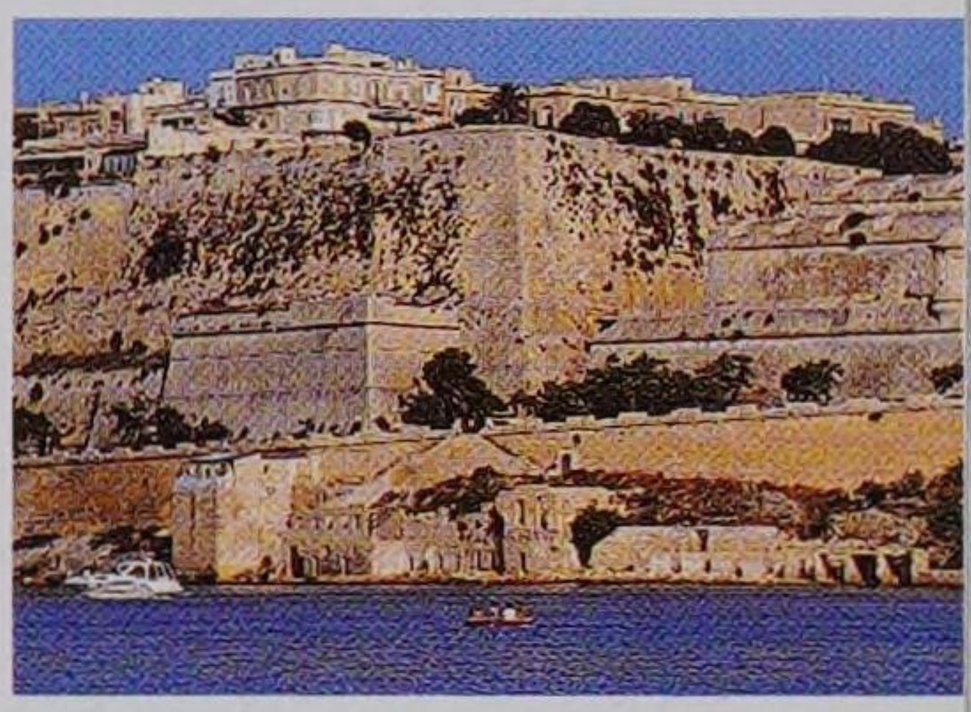
After departing from **Sliema Creek**, the harbour cruise ship heads for Manoel Island, headquarters of a submarine flotilla during World War II. It was here that Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena (1723–32) had the fortress built that bears his name.

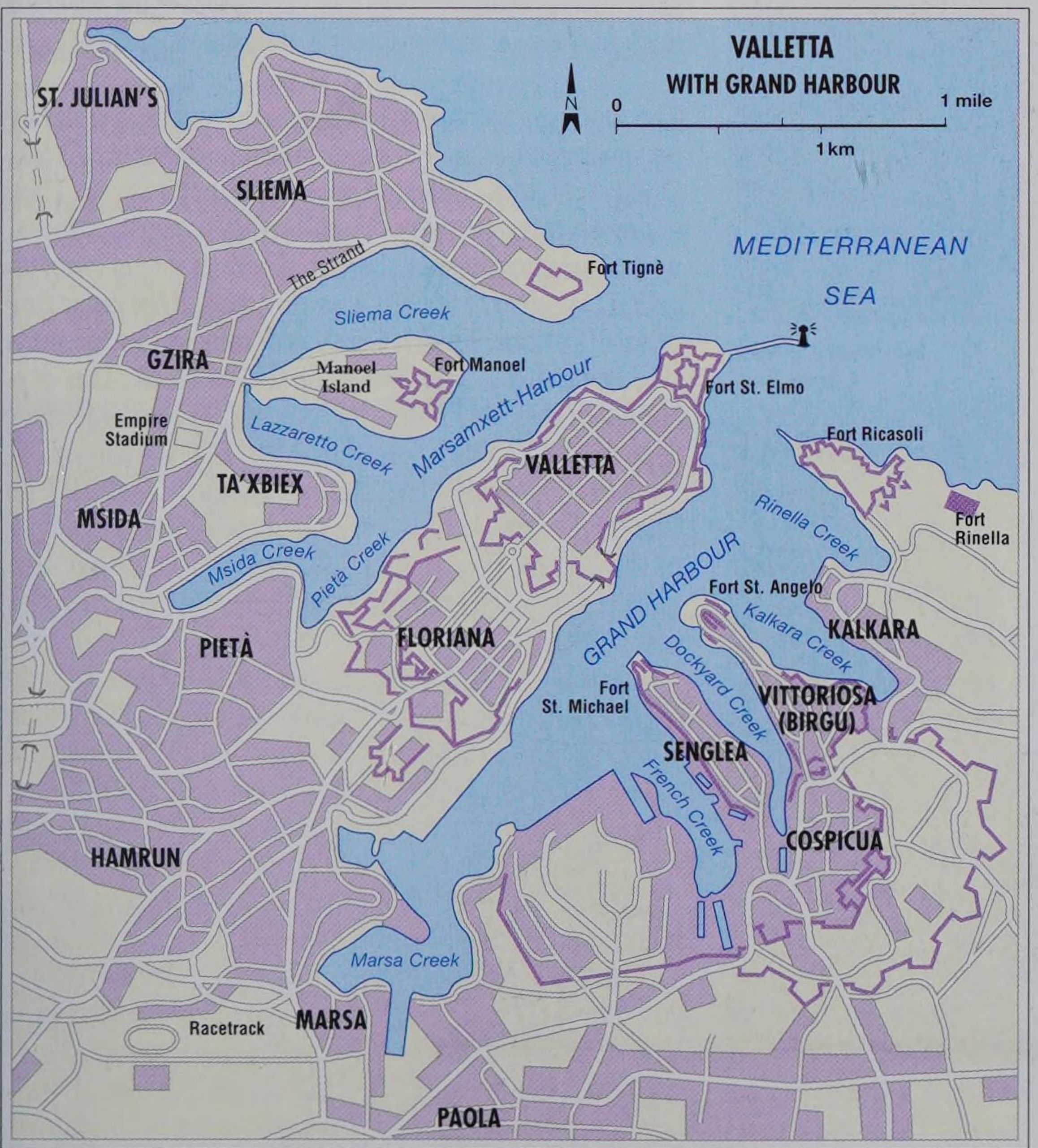
The next creek is called **Lazaretto Creek**, so named because it was once a quarantine station for plague-endangered ships from the Levant. Covering the entire peninsula on the right as the ship leaves the marina is the Ta'Xbiex residential area, with its villas. Anchored just around the corner is the colourful three-masted schooner known as the *Black Pearl*; it was built for the film *Popeye*, and has now been turned into a restaurant.

Msida Creek, with its broad church of St Joseph, goes a long way inland; the marina here can accommodate 900 yachts. The next inlet, Pietà Creek, is where the large car ferries for Gozo depart; beyond the ferry docks, beneath the bastions of Floriana, is the handful of ships that makes up the Maltese Navy. St Luke's Hospital and a villa once occupied by Queen Elisabeth II can be seen on top of Gwardamanga Hill, the small promontory separating the two creeks.

The towering fortifications of Floriana and then Valletta itself can come into view as the ship enters **Marsamxett Harbour**; St Michael's Bastion is actually the highest one in the city. The ship now passes the high dome of the Carmelite Church and the neo-Gothic campanile of the Anglican Cathedral of St Paul (1839–41) before rounding Fort St Elmo. The latter is still used for military purposes; its real moment of glory was during the Great Siege of 1565, when it withstood the might of the entire Turkish army for a full 31 days.

St Michael's Bastion





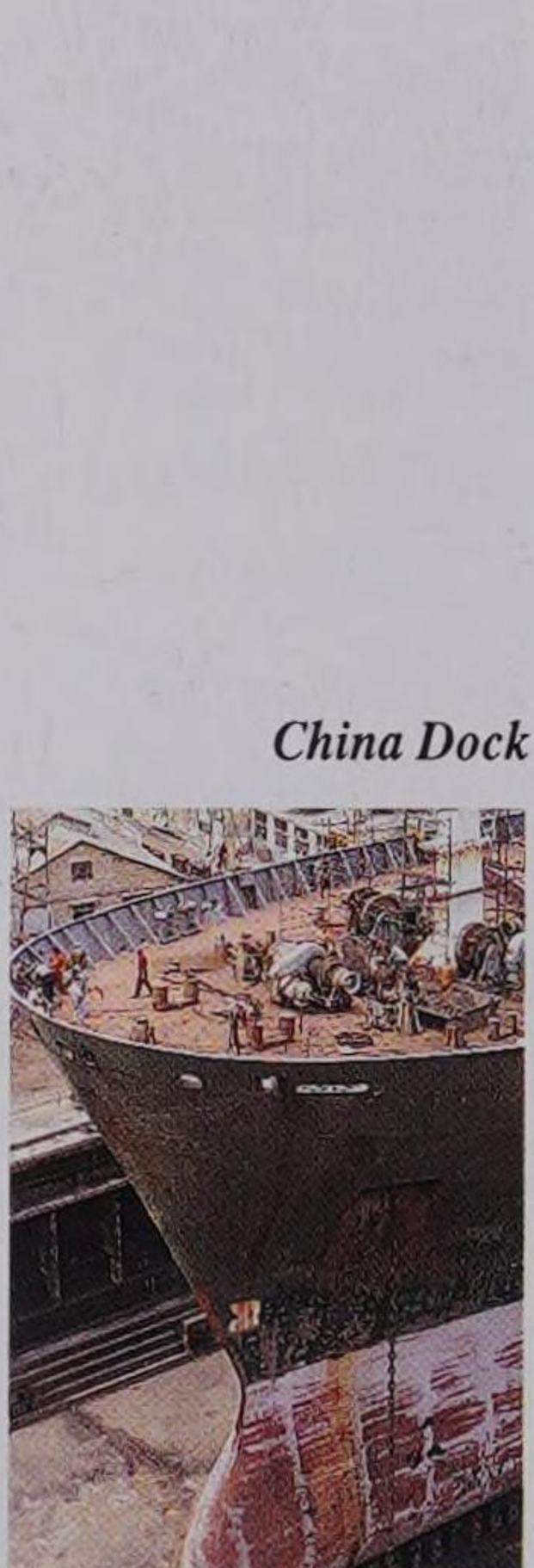
Grand Harbour

Built by the British and bombarded by the Italians in 1941, the **mole** at the entrance to **Grand Harbour** is a reminder of the second great siege of Valletta that took place during World War II, when chains and an underwater net blocked submarine access to the harbour.

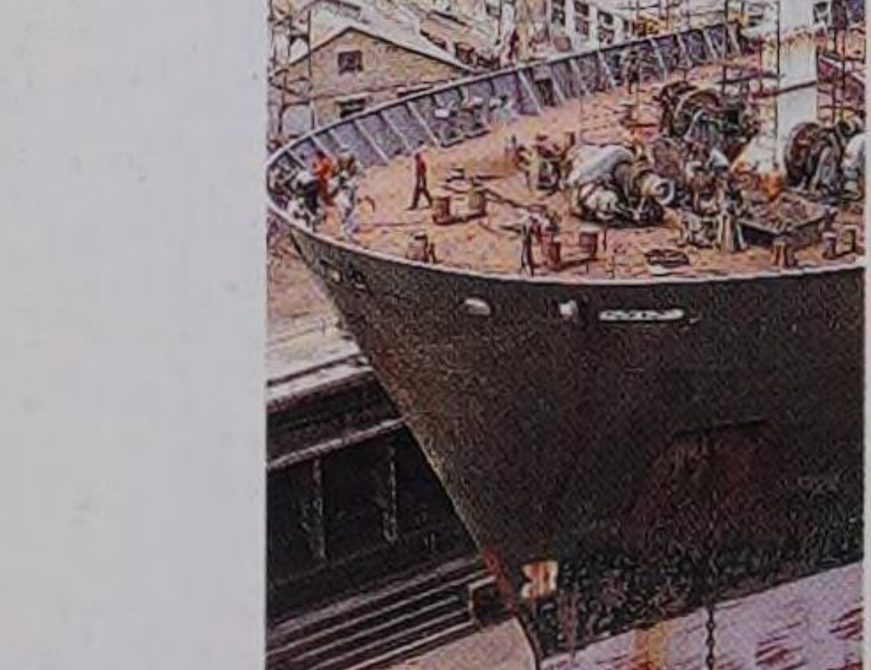
The five natural harbour basins mean that the 16km (10 miles) of coastline within Grand Harbour are optimally protected; this was also an important factor influencing the decision by the deputation who came here in 1530 on behalf of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem (*see page 5*). One bastion follows another; behind the long facade on the right is the Sacra Infirmeria (*see page 29*). Down below on the quay is a building with six large round-arched windows where the fish market is held. The long bastion of golden sandstone between Lower and Upper Barracca Gardens was built under Grand Master Laskaris (1636–57); it dates from the time when Valletta was extended to become a centre of Mediterranean trade. These monuments to past glory presently give way to reminders of the industrial age: the atomic power station and the colourful piles of containers come into view. Most of the big ships dock in the new harbour near Kalafrana these days.

The Dockyard complex in Grand Harbour is divided by peninsulas into a number of separate creeks: French Creek, Dockyard Creek, Kalkara Creek and Rinella Creek. They are often referred to by the collective name 'Cotonera' which commemorates the two Spanish grand masters called Cotoner (1660–80) who constructed the outer ring of fortifications. French Creek is dominated by the massive crane that towers above the **China Dock**. This dry-dock for ships weighing up to 300,000 tons was built here by the People's Republic of China; it can accommodate all the traffic that passes through the Suez Canal. The dockyards on Malta are the most important source of jobs, employing around 5,000 people; activities comprise roughly 30 percent shipbuilding and 70 percent repair work.

China Dock



French Creek is so named because Napoleon's ships anchored here in 1798 on their way to Egypt. Napoleon wanted to annexe Malta, and when he asked for fresh water for his 400 ships it was really a request to capitulate. The grand master at the time, a German called von Lompesch, refused – and thus earned himself the dubious distinction of being Malta's very last grand master. It took Napoleon just 24 hours to capture the islands.



The watchful Vedette

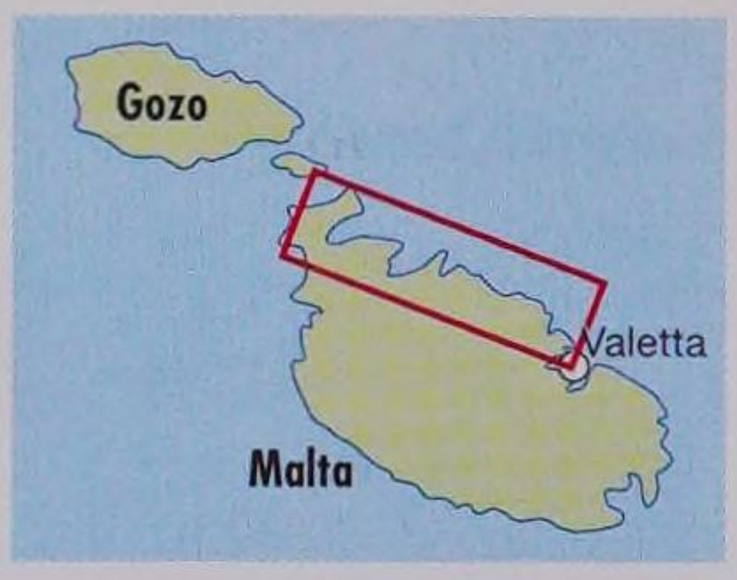
The 'three cities' of Senglea, Cospicua and Vittoriosa (*see also page 49*) are grouped around **Dockyard Creek**, with Cospicua at the head of the creek and Senglea and Vittoriosa on the peninsulas either side. The whole harbour could be effectively monitored from the **Vedette** –

the small hexagonal watchtower carved with a symbolic eye and ear at the end of the **Senglea Peninsula**. During the Great Siege of 1565 there used to be a long iron chain stretched taut from here to **Fort St Angelo** on Vittoriosa Point. The Hospitallers had first settled in Birgu (the medieval name for **Vittoriosa**) in 1530; their galleons were anchored in the small bay in lee of the fort and a pontoon bridge used to lead across to Fort St Michael. After the Great Siege, Birgu was renamed Vittoriosa, but when the knights moved to their new capital, Valetta, the power structure went with them. The first British docks were installed at Fort St Michael in 1800: the so-called 'Dock No 1'. The British used the fort as the headquarters of their entire Mediterranean fleet.

Between the last two creeks in Grand Harbour, several buildings with pillared porticoes and temple-like facades can be seen dominating the ridge facing Valletta; this was the former location of the British military hospital. The last creek, **Rinella Creek**, contains an installation used for pumping out oil tankers before their entry into dry-dock. The peninsula here is dominated by **Fort Ricasoli**, built in the 17th century; it has a fine portal, and is due to be re-opened to the public very soon.

The harbour cruise ship now leaves Grand Harbour and returns to its starting-point at The Strand in Sliema. Fishing boat crews used to give thanks for their safe return to harbour here with the words *Sliemalik Marija* ('Peace be with you, Mary'); that is how Sliema got its name. The word is also derived from the Arabic *salem* and the Hebrew *shalom*.

Sliema waterfront



Route 2

The north coast (37km/22 miles) *See map page 16/17*

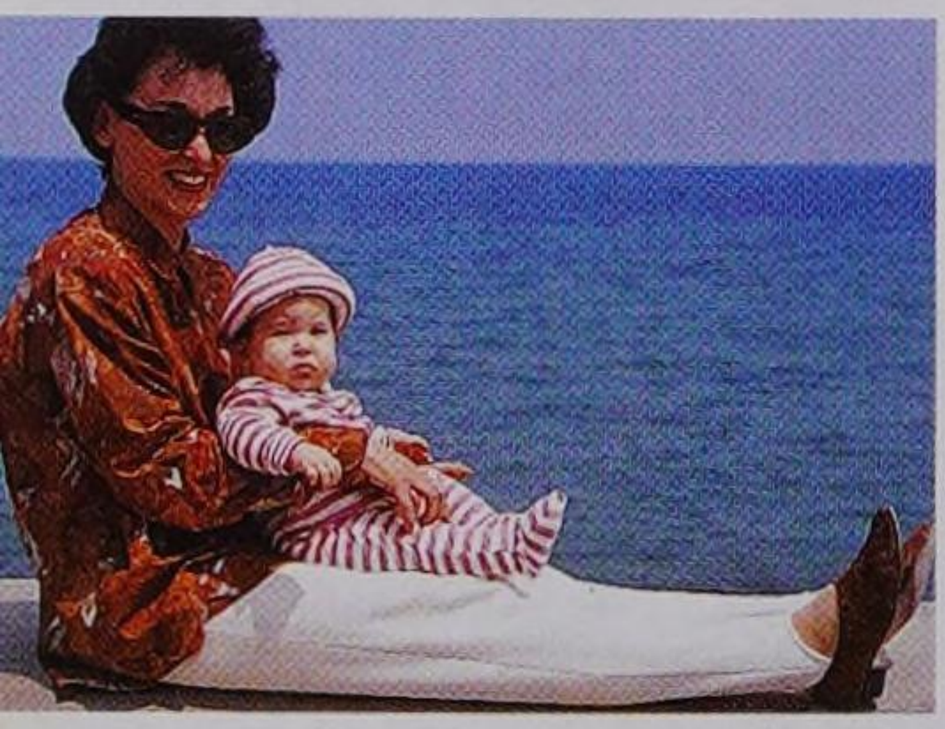
This route leads from Valletta along the north coast and passes through several of Malta's most important holiday resorts, with their sandy beaches and tourist facilities. It ends up at sleepy Paradise Bay, next to the ferry docks for the neighbouring island of Gozo.

Drive from the Triton Fountain in Valletta through Floriana and then take the exit signposted to **Pietà** and **Msida**. Msida Creek (3km/2 miles) is a yachting marina with all modern conveniences. The broad facade of St Joseph's Church with its twin towers at the quayside is a distinctive feature of this bay, and Malta University lies on the hill behind it. The rather less attractive chimney above the right-hand side of the bay belongs to Malta's largest hospital, St Luke's.

The coastal promenade leads past the district of **Ta'-Xbiex**; many of the fine villas here are owned by diplomats. The broad bay is divided into Lazaretto Creek and Sliema Creek by Manoel Island; it's a good idea to get out of the car at this point and take a brief walk along the beautiful promenade.

Manoel Island

The Order's quarantine station used to be located on **Manoel Island**; the fort was built here in 1730 to protect Marsamxett Harbour. Today the island, which is connected by a causeway to the mainland, looks a bit forlorn, despite the presence of a few shipyards and the Phoenician Glassblowers Factory, where genuine mouth-blown glass can be purchased direct. The government has plans to make Manoel Island an important tourist attraction.



Satisfied visitors

Sliema

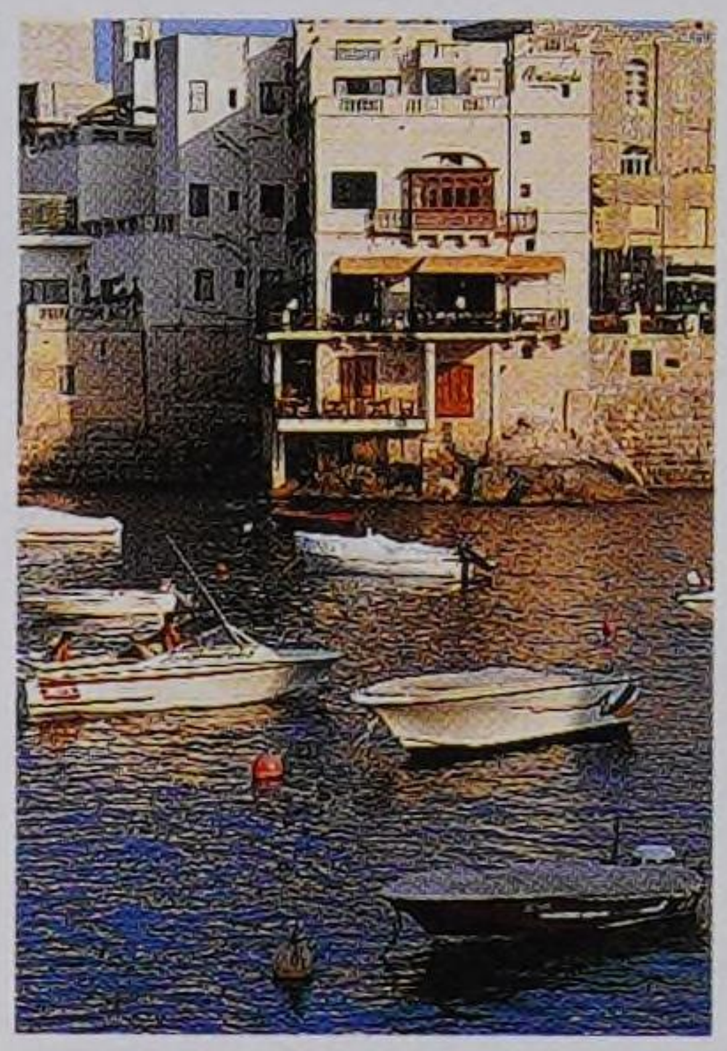
The section of bay after Manoel Island contains Marina Street and The Strand – a long section of road devoted to shopping and entertainment. The two municipalities of Gzira and Sliema merged into one long ago; boutiques, hotels, cafés and docks for various ferry routes, pleasure cruises and round trips all contribute to the incessant bustle of activity here in colourful **Sliema Creek** (6km/3.7 miles). No-one can get past the terrace of the 'Magic Kiosk' (bar, café and restaurant) just at the junction with Tower Road; and down Tower Road itself, the 'Plaza' shopping centre has a full eight storeys of expensive boutiques (Tiffany, Coin, Cardin, Max Mara and Bata), plus a café and an oriental restaurant.

From the kiosk onwards the coast road is known as the Tigné Seafront. The **Jesus of Nazareth Church** is sandwiched between modern developments, and the Wal-

ter Distillery, built in 1881, looks almost touching in comparison to the ten-storey concrete monster next to it. The forest of television aerials above the garrison on the Tigné peninsula reveals that the barracks have now been converted into water-side apartments.

Malta's 'sun and fun' starts on the other side of the peninsula: rocky coasts, sandy beaches, swimming pools, diving, boat trips, beach bars, ballrooms and nightclubs. The entire resort area extends as far as St George's Bay, 14km (8 miles) away. Attractive old Maltese houses with tasteful neoclassical facades, colonnades and front gardens are dwarfed here by massive purpose-built concrete blocks, some as high as 14 storeys. Planning regulations to prevent the worst excesses were obviously not in existence when all this was built.

The coast road from the Tigné peninsula now becomes Tower Road which comes from the direction of Sliema Creek: here there are more bars, hotels and shops. Just where Tower Road makes a sharp bend to the left there's a nice restaurant, 'Il Fortizza', with its Tower Bar, picturesquely situated in a former fortification – and a good beach just around the corner.



St Julian's and the Barracuda

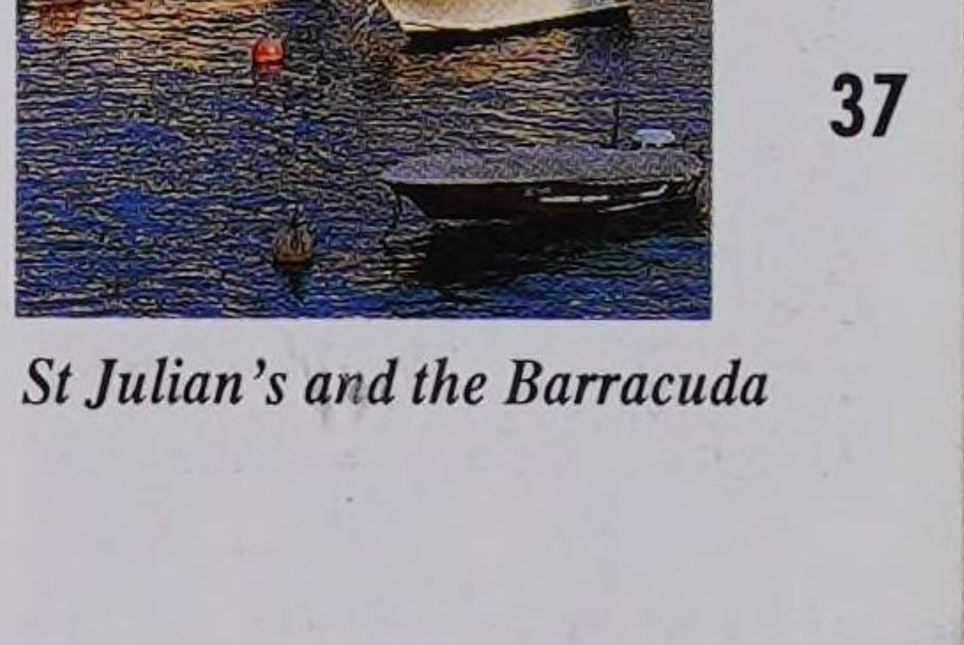
St Julian's

Balluta Bay is just next to St Julian's Point, and the 'Barracuda' restaurant at the entrance to it does very good traditional Maltese cuisine; on the other side wonderful old houses like the neo-Gothic Villino Priuli are overshadowed by giant modern concrete buildings. There's still some greenery left around the bay, however. **Spinola Bay** next door, and its colourful boats and small Maltese houses with their balconies, is still worthy of a picture postcard. Spinola Palace, high above the bay, was built in 1688 and gave the bay its name. It would still be magnificent today if all the buildings hadn't appeared in front of it. There is a good view of its three-storey structure and balustrade from the interior courtyard, however – the golden stone, green shutters and leafy park combine to form an attractive and harmonious Maltese ensemble.

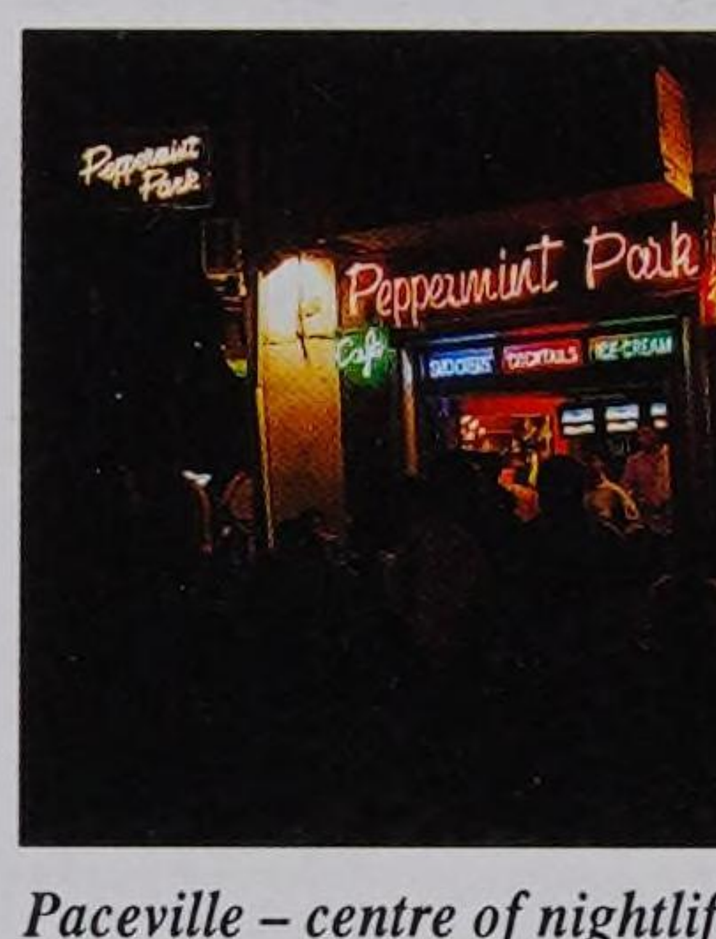
After Spinola Bay, St George's Road ascends slightly and leads inland to **Paceville**, the centre of nightlife on the island. There are regular traffic jams here at weekends, and the streets are blocked by visitors to clubs such as 'Peppermint Park', 'Coconut Groove' and 'Euphoria'.

High up on the peninsula is the exclusive 'Dragonara Palace Casino', with its neoclassical colonnade; inside, it's definitely jacket-and-tie territory.

During the daytime some people even go swimming on Paceville Beach, where rocks alternate with small patches of sandy beach. The water – like everywhere else on Malta and Gozo – is very clean.



Paceville – centre of nightlife



Brave bathers

St George's Road now comes out in St George's Bay, with its new and beautifully designed five-star hotels, including the St George Corinthia and the Radisson SAS Bay Point Resort. These modern structures stand in contrast to the Villa Rosa Hotel, an attractive castle-like building with a tower, set in a magnificent palm grove. The Eden Century cinema complex is a major attraction in this area.

After St George's Bay the road leaves the coast and goes through the expensive residential areas of St Andrew's and Swieqi; the seafront along here is packed with detached houses. St Andrew's actually used to be a large army base, but has now been converted into civilian housing and holiday facilities. Near **Bahar ic-Caghaq** the road arrives at the coast again (19km/11 miles), and the enormous leisure complex known as the Splash & Fun Park comes into view, with its water slides, the largest sea-water swimming-pool on the island, and a children's play area based on the dinosaur theme. Fun for the whole family.

The next section of the coast road as far as the bend it makes at Salina Bay is best ignored; a major rubbish dump is even being planned here.

Holiday city

Bugibba seafront

Bugibba and St Paul's Bay

Salina Bay (22km/13 miles) is named after the local salt pan, which have been worked since the early days of the Knights and some of which are still in operation. The bay marks the start of the largest tourist complex on Malta. It took just under ten years to build the massive 'holiday city' on the Qawra peninsula between Salina and St Paul's Bay. **Bugibba** (24km/15 miles), with its shops, restaurants and landing stages, has become the main town in the area. Bugibba is also a popular resort with the Maltese themselves; at the weekend they pack out the restaurants here, which is why some establishments here stay open during the winter months as well.

Captain Morgan sends out his glass-bottomed boat several times daily from the harbour mole in **St Paul's Bay**, providing a closer look at Malta's fascinating undersea flora and fauna. The boat passes very close to St Paul's Islands with their reefs.

St Paul's Islands, just off St Paul's Bay, are the site of the Apostle Paul's legendary shipwreck in AD60. A statue commemorates him, as do several local placenames, eg San Pawl Milqi (St Paul Welcomed), a small church where the remains of an old Roman villa have been excavated. The town of St Paul's Bay still bears some resemblance to the picturesque fishing community it once was, though property speculators with their high-rises have rather ruined the former idyll.

The road leads around the bay and through the suburb of Xemxija and then turns inland towards **Mellieha**

(30km/18 miles). Just outside the town on the right is the **Selmun Palace**, a 17th-century building which today forms part of a hotel complex. The little bay of Ghajn Hadid nearby with its sandy beach is worth a detour.

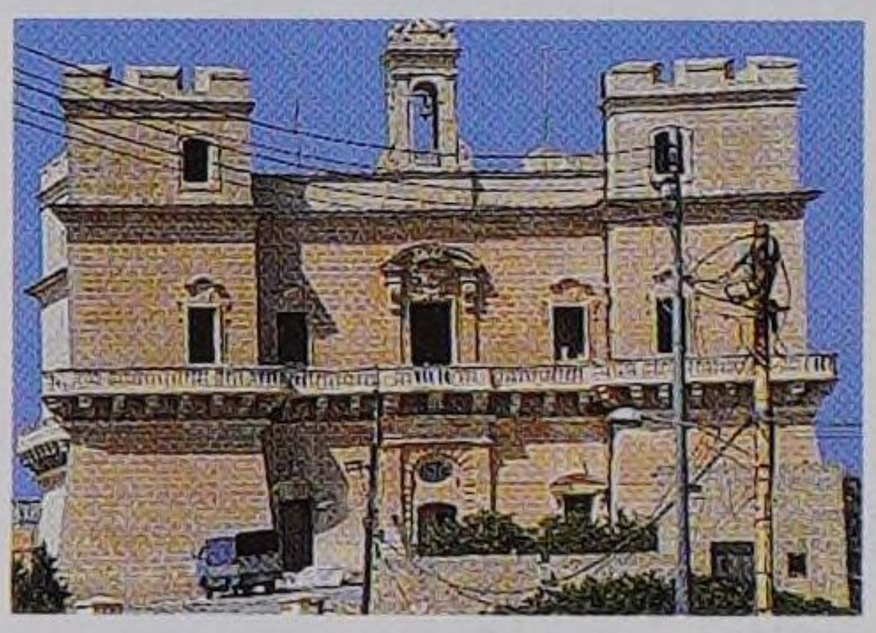
Mellieha and its parish church can be seen a long way off because of their exposed location up on a ridge. The villas of the desirable Santa Maria Estate enjoy panoramic views of the coast. The church of the Nativity of Our Lady in the town itself is built above a chapel hewn out of the rock, which probably dates from the Early Christian period; its ancient fresco of Our Lady continues to draw the pilgrims to this day.

Mellieha Bay is the largest and most attractive sandy bay on the whole island; all kinds of water sports are available here. One of the real highlights, however, at the top of the bay, is the small **Ghadira bird sanctuary** (tours in summer, weekends only 9am–12.30pm and 2–4pm).

After Mellieha Bay the road ascends to **Marfa Ridge**, and halfway up there is a small junction. The road off to the left leads to the Knights' **Red Tower** (1649), with a magnificent ★ **view** of the Gozo Channel and the other side of the island; this is a favourite barbecue and picnic spot for the locals. The road leading away to the right goes to **Armier Bay** (34km/21 miles), a small sandy beach set against a typically Mediterranean stretch of landscape.

The main road leads on from here to the Gozo ferry station at **Cirkewwa** (37km/22 miles); the turn-off to **Paradise Bay** is just after the desalination plant. Paradise Bay is a nice quiet little place, ideal for snorkelling, with lots of sand and rocks and with a view of Gozo; it's just two minutes' walk to the sea from the car park. Captain Morgan's submarine, based at the mole in Cirkewwa, dives to a depth of 30m (100ft). Up to 26 passengers can peer out through the 12 portholes at the underwater world between Malta and Comino.

St Paul's Bay
Selmun Palace



Learning young

Route 3

Mdina and Rabat

Impressively perched on a high ridge rising out of a flat landscape, the historic citadel of Mdina is visible from afar. Mdina's medieval walls and fortifications were built above Arab foundations, and its rich combination of famous cathedral, many palaces and narrow alleyways makes it a fasinating place to visit. Its twin city of Rabat, originally only a suburb, is a mysterious and confusing place with its winding medieval streets and Early Christian catacombs and passageways.

The walled city

The ridge on which Mdina stands was inhabited as long ago as the Bronze Age: ruined walls, foundations and necropoles all document the 'refuge' of *Malet* from the Punic period (1st century BC). Under the Romans from 241BC onwards, Melita flourished and was famed for its honey (the name is derived from the Latin word for honey, *melis*). The Arabs (870–1090) fortified the city with thick defensive walls and gave it its present-day name. Mdina (literally 'the walled city') was the capital of the island until the Knights of St John arrived in 1530 and constructed Valletta; from then on it was simply referred to as *Città Vecchia*, the 'old city'.

King Alphonse of Aragon conferred the title of *Città Nobile* on Mdina in 1428 after it became the only city on Malta to heroically withstand an attack by Islamic corsairs, who took 3,000 of the island's population prisoner. During the Great Siege of 1565 the Turks concentrated their efforts on Grand Harbour, giving the cavalry garrison at Mdina numerous opportunities for sorties that gradually weakened the enemy. The city also deterred the enemy by reinforcing the battlements with women disguised as soldiers, a ruse which completely deceived the Turks. Although Mdina lost its prestige as the island's capital under the Knights, it later became the bishop's see, and was also allowed to remain the seat of the *Università*, the government advisory body made up of patricians and the clergy.

The city owes its present-day baroque appearance to the large amount of reconstruction that took place after the serious earthquake of 1693, a consequence of the eruption of Mt Etna, which left very few of the city's former buildings standing. Mdina entered the historical spotlight once again in 1798, when Napoleon's troops pillaged the Carmelite Church, and popular outrage turned into an uprising which finally led to the French being driven off the island. Since that time, however, Mdina has remained the 'silent city', Malta's open-air museum. Its many palaces have very fine door-knockers in all sorts of shapes and sizes – but no-one comes to knock any more.

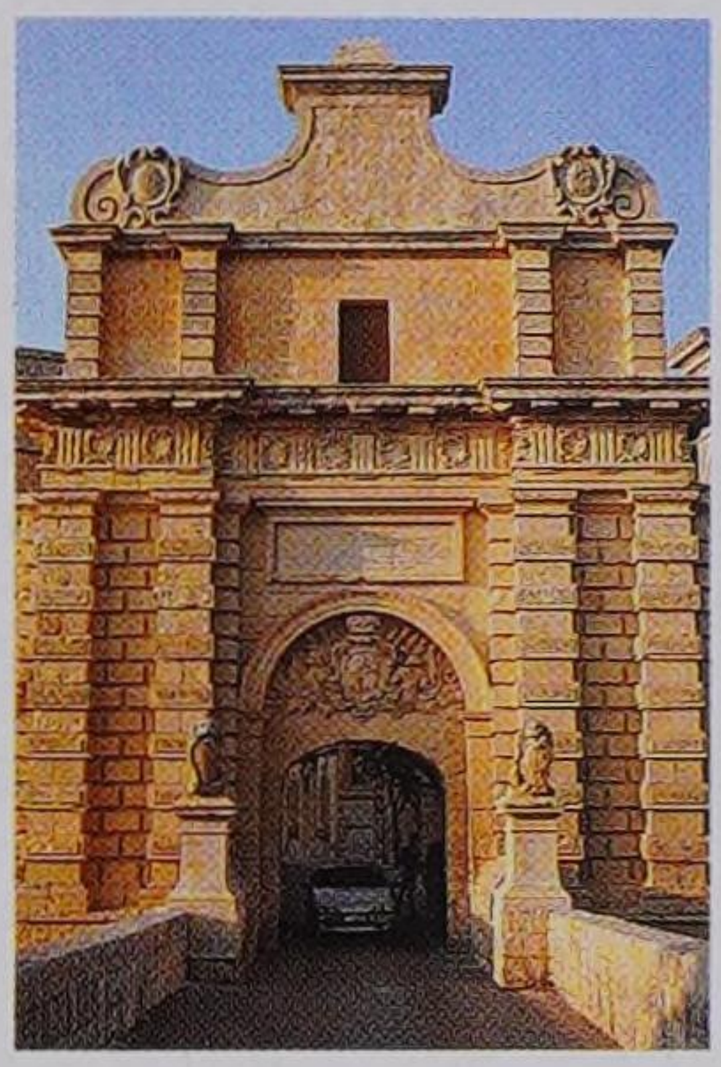
Silent city

City Tour: Mdina

The starting-point of this tour is the main square **Saqqajja** next to Howard Gardens, between Mdina and Rabat; this is where the buses stop. The kiosk here is a good place to enjoy a drink while deciding which mode of transport to use for this tour: your feet, or a typically Maltese *karrozzin* (horse-drawn cab).

From the park opposite the main post office in Museum Road, the bridge with its lions and coats-of-arms leads to the **Main Gate** ❶ of the medieval city of Mdina. It was built in 1724 by Grand Master de Vilhena, and his elaborate insignia can still be seen. Inside the gate St Paul, St Publius and St Agatha – the patron saints of the islands – are all depicted. Immediately to the right is the entrance to the **Mdina Dungeons** (June to September 10am–7pm, October to May 10am–6pm) which were in use until 1813, the year in which torture was made illegal on Malta; for

The Main Gate



Vilhena Palace

Cathedral Museum

a cheery start to the tour, why not attend the audiovisual show here demonstrating various methods of torture and execution from antiquity onwards.

A short distance away is the **Vilhena Palace** ❷, named after the Portugese grand master Antonio Manoel de Vilhena (1722–36) who had it built as a new residence for the *Universit*à (*see page 40*); one of the upstairs rooms contains portraits of several of the patricians and clergymen who made up the government advisory body. Beyond the artistic portal is an inner courtyard framed by attractive Spanish baroque facades. Today, this palace houses the **Museum of Natural History** (1 October until 15 June Monday to Saturday 8.15am–5pm, Sunday 8.15am–4pm; 16 June until 30 September Monday to Saturday 7.45am–2pm), which contains an interesting collection of exhibits documenting the islands' flora, fauna, geology, etc.

The **Torre del Standardo** directly opposite the palace used to be the old guard tower; it was built in the 16th century above Roman ruins.

The street that goes round the Vilhena Palace to the right leads to the **Corte Capitanale** ❸, the former law courts. The statue with its eyes bound on the right of the balcony at the centre of the facade represents Justice. Directly opposite is the **Xara Palace** ❹, bearing the coat-of-arms of the old Maltese family; this attractive building is a hotel today. The small street that runs past it comes out in the square beside the Cathedral; on the left is the former seminary which today houses the ★ **Cathedral Museum** ❺. The balcony above the central portal is supported by atlantes, and the roof ridge has various carvings illustrating Purgatory. The museum contains liturgical instruments, a fine coin collection spanning the history of Malta, Italian and Maltese paintings, several fine engravings, including some by Goya after Velasquez, a portable altar decorated with Byzantine enamel miniatures for celebrating mass on board ships, as well as several magnificent illuminated hymn books dating back to the 11th century. Another highlight here is the comprehensive collection of woodcuts by 16th-century German masters, including Albrecht Dürer.

St Paul's Square is dominated, however, by the **Cathedral** ❻, which occupies the site of the former Roman governor's palace. An Early Christian structure built in the 4th century was then followed by a Norman church (c 1090); the latter was the main cathedral church of Malta and Gozo, and was destroyed in the 1693 earthquake. The present structure – the seat of the bishopric, and 'co-cathedral' with St John's in Valletta – was built by the Maltese architect Lorenzo Gafà between 1697–1702. The proportions of the facade are monumental: flanked by two bell-towers, it has three portals with two different kinds

St Paul's Cathedral

of pilaster (Corinthian below and composite above), and is most impressive when admired from the square. The massive ★ **dome** is Mdina's main landmark.

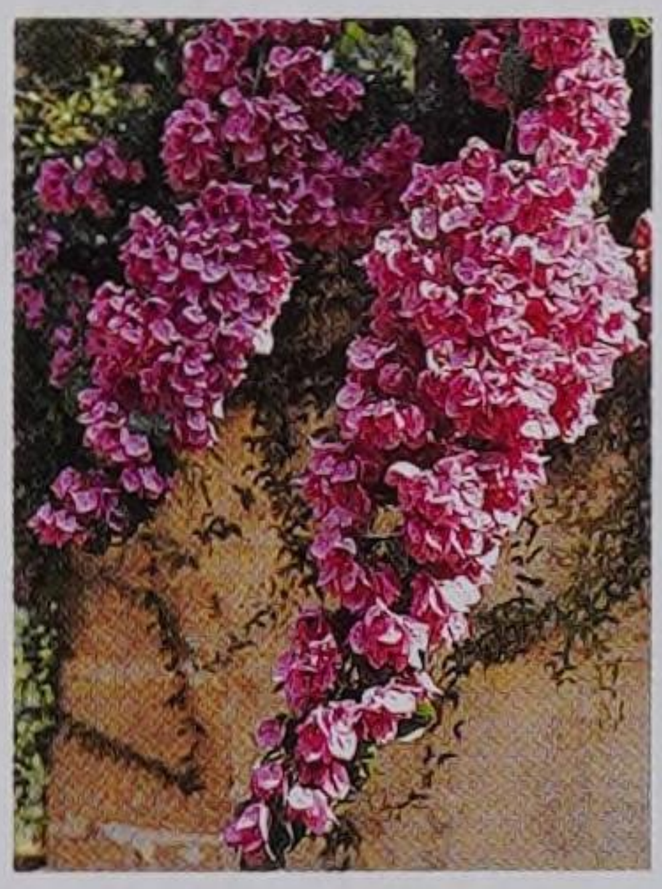
The cathedral's interior is decorated with colourful frescoes illustrating scenes from the life of St Paul. The chapel to the left of the main altar contains a silver tabernacle attributed to Benvenuto Cellini, as well as a Byzantine-style Madonna. The entrance to the sacristy is at the centre of the north aisle: the impressive ★ **oak portal** dates from the previous Norman structure on the site, and is decorated with some marvellous carved panels. The highly artistic polychrome marble sepulchral slabs set into the pavement are every bit as magnificent as those in the co-cathedral in Valletta. Bishops and patricians lie buried here.

Opposite the cathedral facade on the other side of the parvis is the **Palazzo Santa Sophia** ❼ , the ground floor of which dates from 1233, making it the oldest building in Mdina. The upper storey with its Norman-style windows wasn't actually completed until the 19th century, but the original plans were followed throughout.

A little further north up Villegaignon Street, on the left, is the **Carmelite Church** ❽ . This is where the rebellion against the French occupation began in 1798 when the church was plundered; if the French had left the Carmelite Church alone, Malta might never have become British in the first place. The church's facade belies an original interior designed by Francisco Sammut in 1659: red pilasters surround the elliptical ground plan, and the popular spiral columns around the altars are decorated with angel's heads.

A little further up the street on the right is the **Palazzo Falzon** ❾ (Monday to Friday 9am–1pm and 2–4pm), also known as the 'Norman House'. Its present form dates from the late 15th century, and the double windows on the upper storey are characteristic of Siculo-Norman decoration.

Bougainvillaea

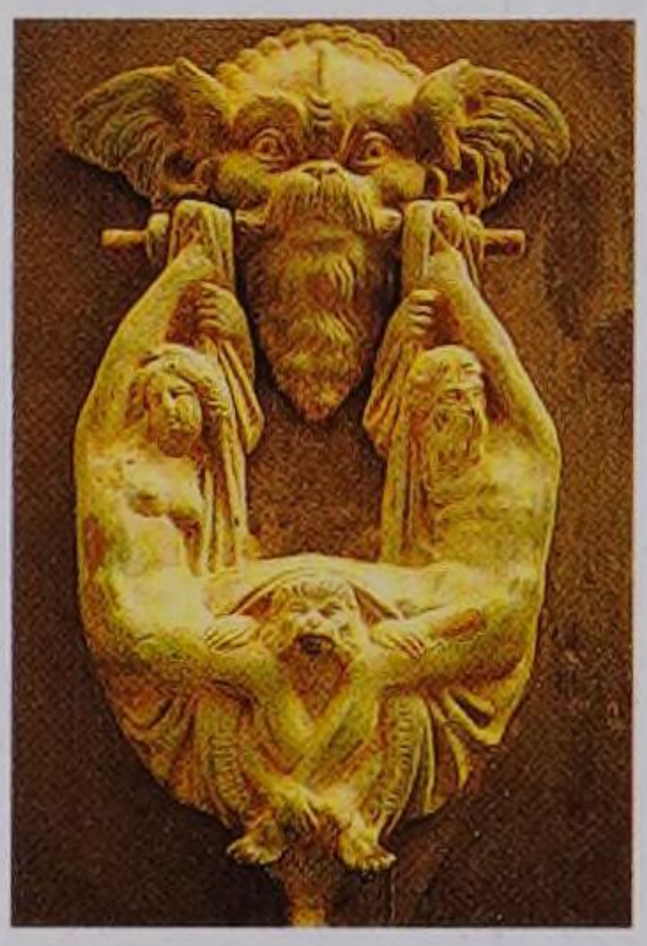


Carmelite Church

This Norman style was still popular on Malta long after the Renaissance had made its mark on Italy; it was only the arrival of the Knights of St John in 1530 that changed things. The medieval-style inner courtyard with its pretty fountain and stone steps leading to the upper storey is wonderfully atmospheric, and some of the inner rooms have been preserved in their original state.

Villegaignon Street comes out into **Bastion Square**, where there's a fine ★ **view** of northern Malta which also makes it clear just how exposed this former capital city was. Anyone eager to enjoy the view a little while longer would be well advised to visit the Fontanella Tea Rooms just down the street on the right; the cakes here are deservedly famous.

Retrace your steps now; the first building on the left after St Paul's Square is the **Banca Giuratele** ⑩, the old town hall commissioned by Grand Master Vilhena in 1730. The building next door, the **Palazzo Testaferrata** ⑪, stands on the corner of Mezquita Street which leads off to the right towards the West Gate. In the first narrow side-street off to the right, the graceful double windows on the first floor of the **Palazzo Gatto-Murina** ⑫ are another good illustration of the Siculo-Norman style of architecture.



Casa Inguanez knocker

Facing the end of this little street, at No 12, is the entrance to the **Casa Inguanez** ⑬, the traditional seat of the Maltese governor before the Knights of St John arrived on the islands. The Inguanez family were accorded the hereditary right of governorship by the kings of Aragon, and the Spanish royal family still has special domiciliary rights within the walls of this building. The door-knocker is very ornate: it depicts Neptune with his trident, surrounded by sea-serpents and sea-horses.

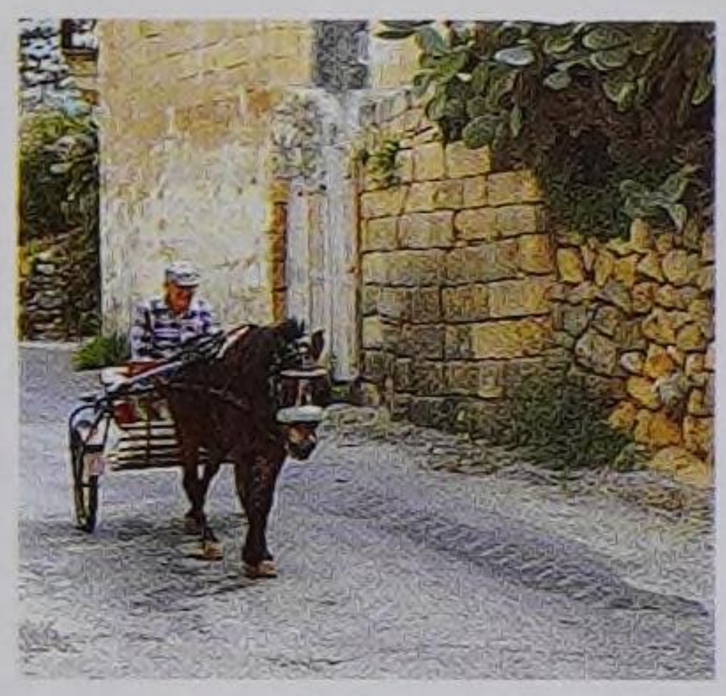
A fine patrician house

Mezquita Street broadens out now, and the Maltese palace on the square contains the **Mdina Experience Show** ⑭ (Monday to Friday 11am–4pm, Saturday 11am–1pm). A visit to this multimedia extravaganza combines an opportunity to learn more about the city's history with a chance to examine this Maltese patrician's house at close quarters; a highlight here is the steam locomotive that used to connect Mdina and Valletta before the railway was closed in 1931.

At the end of Mezquita Street there's a fine panoramic view of the surrounding region from the **New City Gate** ⑮; the former railway station, now converted into a restaurant, and the old route taken by the railway that led along a tunnel through the hill are both still clearly recognisable. On the ridge opposite, the long building with the tower is the former British military hospital at Mtarfa. Retrace your steps now through the 'silent city' to the Main Gate, the starting-point of the tour.

City Tour: Rabat

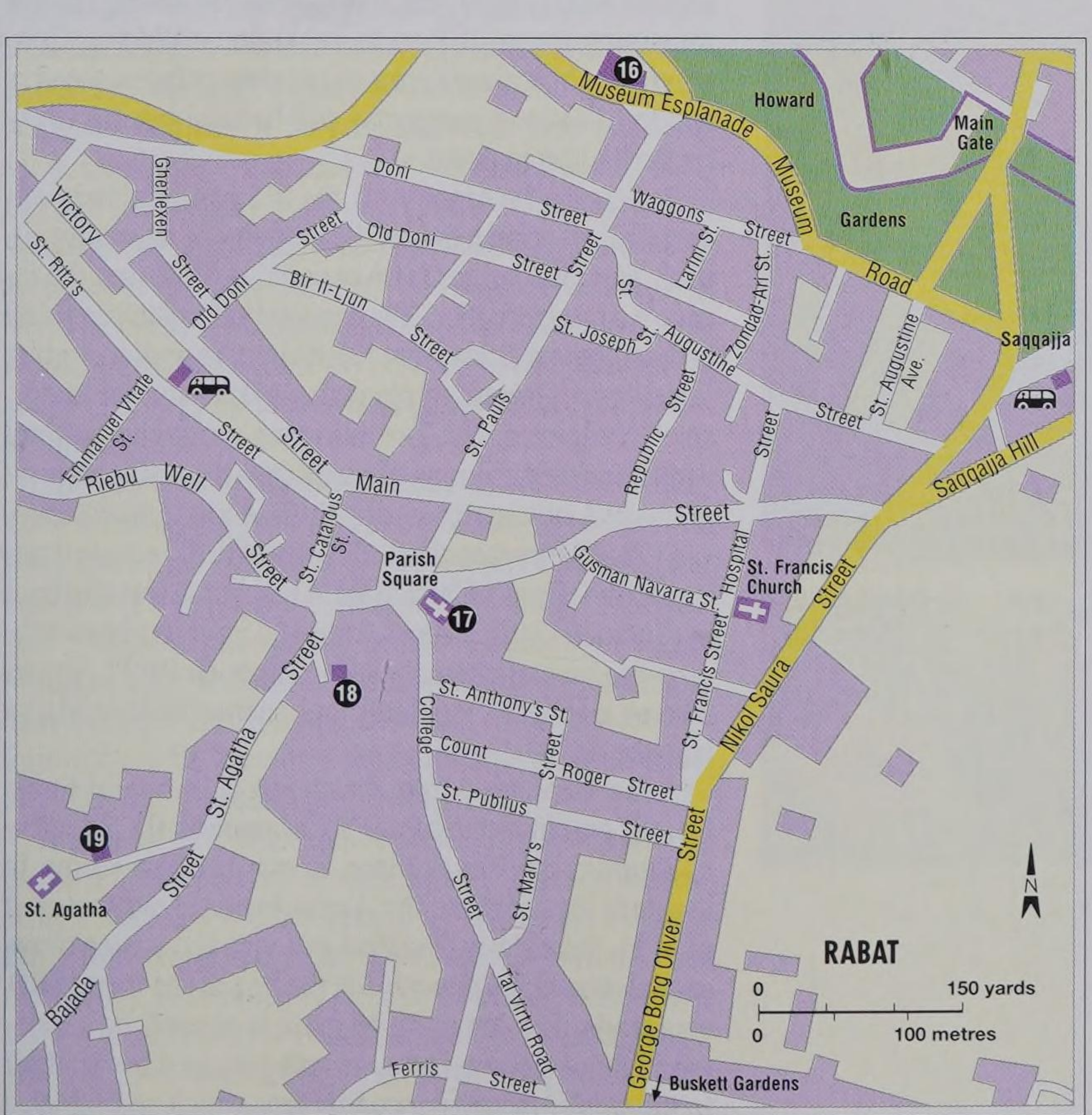
Rabat was a suburb of Mdina which grew up around the market that was originally held outside the gates of the citadel. During the British colonial period it expanded rapidly. Excavations and a number of accidental archaeological discoveries have now established the limits of Roman *Melita*. According to the Roman custom of that time, the dead were buried in cemeteries outside the city walls. The Early Christians created an extensive network of subterranean catacombs, galleries and passageways, and today's city of Rabat lies above them. St Paul's Grotto, where according to legend the saint sheltered during his stay on the island in AD60, became a place of pilgrimage. The mighty baroque church built above the site in 1692 doesn't really suit medieval Rabat at all, with its quiet, country town atmosphere. It's only on Sundays when the street market is held that there is any kind of commotion in Rabat, with people arriving from all directions. But by early afternoon it's all over and the city becomes an oasis of tranquillity once more.

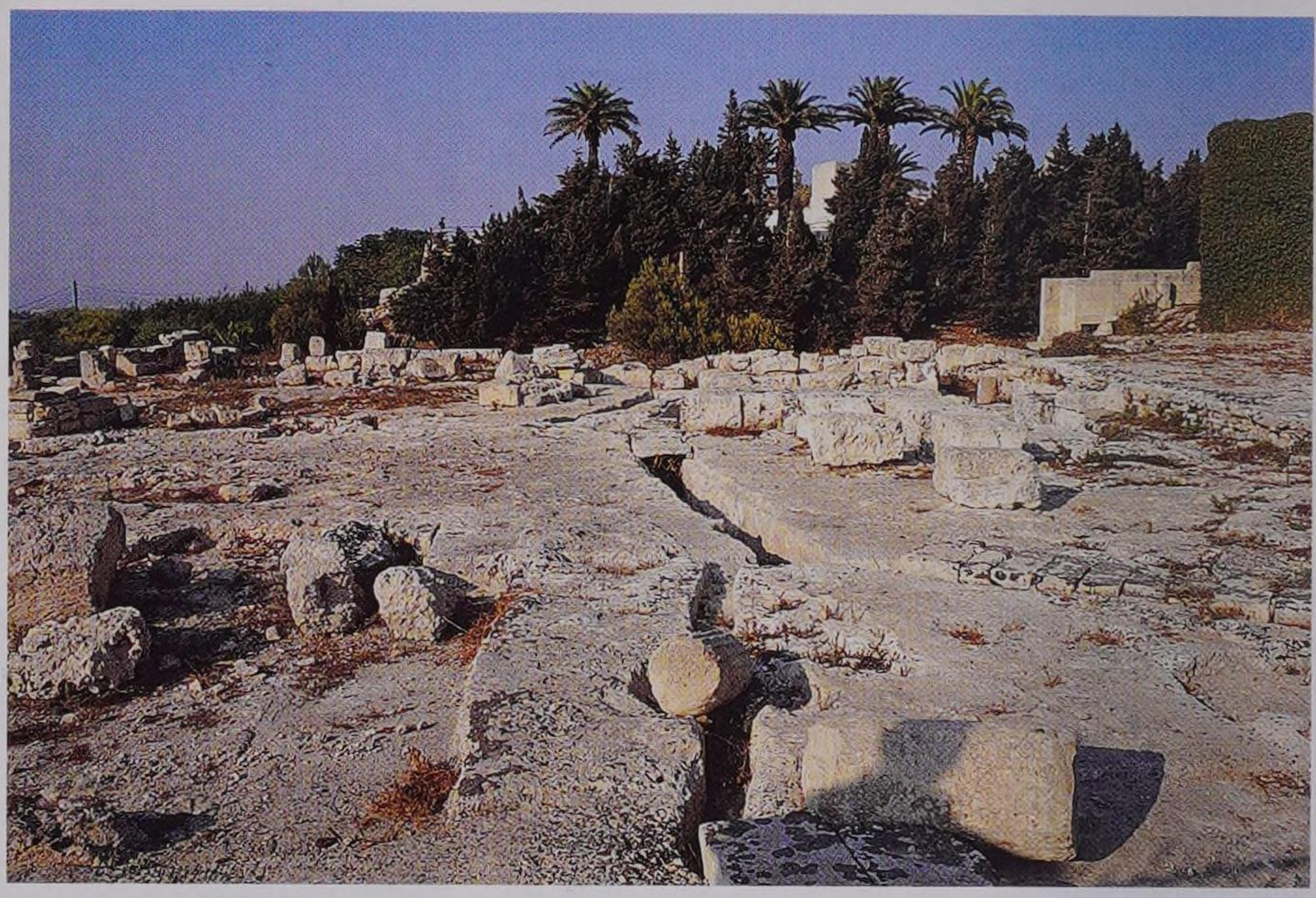


An oasis of tranquillity

Mdina viewed from Rabat

On the other side of Howard Gardens, at the end of Museum Road, is the **Roman Villa Museum** ⓰ (1 October





Roman Villa Museum

St Paul's Church

until 15 June Monday to Saturday 8.15am–5pm, Sunday 8.15am–4pm; 16 June until 30 September Monday to Saturday 7.45am–2pm). The foundations are among the few remaining traces of Roman habitation on Malta. Contemporary historians spoke of temples, palaces, theatres and fortifications; many may still be awaiting discovery by the archaeologists.

Built in the 1st century AD, the 'Roman villa' here was actually just a town house, the property of a wealthy citizen. The foundations were exposed in 1881, but the facade is a reconstruction. The entrance hall contains several archaeological finds from the Roman period, including jewellery, domestic implements, glassware, oil lamps, small sculptures, etc. The adjoining atrium has several well-preserved sections of mosaic on the walls; the epigrams in Arabic script date from the 9th to 11th centuries.

St Paul's Street connects directly with the square dominated by **St Paul's Church** ⓱. This church was also built by Lorenzo Gafà; it dates from 1675 but has been subjected to several alterations since then. St Paul's Grotto, where the apostle supposedly took shelter while on Malta, is in the crypt.

A few steps away from the church in St Agatha Street lies the entrance to **St Paul's Catacombs** ⓲ (Monday to Saturday 8.30am–4.30pm, in summer 8am–2pm). In use until the arrival of the Arabs, but only rediscovered in 1894, these Early Christian galleries and passageways extend around the city outside the line of the former Roman walls. The underground maze is entered via a modern flight of steps, and the various passageways lead off to the tombs from a main chamber which resembles a

chapel. The circular stone platforms are thought to have been platforms for funerary banquets modelled on the Last Supper. There are eight different types of graves down here, the most frequent types being wall-niches *(loculi)* and arched tombs *(arcolosi)*.

St Agatha's Catacombs ⓳ (Monday to Friday 9–11.45am and 1-3.45pm, Saturday 9–11.45am, conducted tours only) are situated down a street at right-angles to St Agatha Street. The main chamber here has some well-preserved frescoes dating from the Middle Ages, and several of the more remote passageways still contain biblical symbols dating from the Early Christian period. A seven-armed Jewish candelabra reveals that non-Christians were buried here too. A cycle of frescoes is dedicated to St Agatha, patron saint of the town of Catania, who was martyred in Sicily. According to local legend, Agatha was married to a Roman consul in these very catacombs sometime during the 3rd century. When she returned to Sicily she suffered a particularly cruel martyrdom.

St Agatha's Catacombs

Excursion to Clapham Junction (3km/1.8 miles)

Follow Buskett Road (there are buses from here to Dingli) southwards from the Saqqajja main square. Pass the Dominican convent – which has a very attractive cloister – and at St Dominic's Square follow the sign to Buskett. A short while later a car park and a bus stop come into view, marking the entrance to ★ **Verdala Palace** (Tuesday and Friday only, 9am–noon and 2–5pm), the former summer residence of the grand masters of the Order of the Knights of St John. In 1586 Fra Hugues Loubeux de Verdalle (1581–95), cardinal and grand master, commissioned Gerolamo Cassar to construct this building in the shape of a fortified medieval keep with four corner towers and a moat.

The palace is idyllically situated above Buskett Gardens, formerly the hunting preserve of the grand masters from 1565. This is actually the highest point on the island, and there is a wonderful ★ **view** in all directions. The Maltese president and visiting heads of state often stay at Verdala Castle, and despite the fact that many of the rooms have been converted into suites – the corner towers contain modern bathrooms – the building's original structure has been faithfully preserved.

A portrait bust of Grand Master Verdalle can be seen in the left-hand corner of the entrance hall, and a series of frescoes (1590) in the Great Hall illustrate his life story. Early 18th-century paintings depicting themes from Greek mythology have recently been discovered on the barrel vault – it turns out they had been painted over at the request of Lady Bonham-Carter, the wife of one of the island's British governors. One of the finest items of

Verdala Palace

Buskett blooms

furniture here is a corner-cupboard with doors of transparent marble from Gozo carved from a single block. A generous marble staircase winds its way up to the upper storey in a magnificent double oval. The stairs were built so shallow on purpose: during the days of the Knights it was very hard to bend heavy suits of armour at the knee. The upper storey was altered by the Portugese grand master Fra Antonio Manoel de Vilhena (1722–36), and the playful sandstone architecture reflects the tastes of his time. On the right-hand side of the hall there is a painting of the German grand master Fra Ferdinand von Hompesch (1797–98), the last to lead the Order before it was banished from Malta by Napoleon. After the French were beaten by the British, the palace was used as an officers' prison; French officers whiled away their time playing board-games here, and the patterns can still be seen on the floor in places.

The former grand master's bedroom – on the left before the hall entrance – contains the flight of stairs used as a secret escape route. From up on the roof there's an amazing ★ **view** of the island of Malta, taking in Valletta, the steep southwest coast, Rabat, Mdina and sometimes Gozo too, if conditions are clear.

The small **chapel** situated in the grounds of the palace dates from the 16th century and is dedicated to St Anthony the Abbot.

Buskett Gardens

Beneath the palace are the famous subtropical **Buskett Gardens** (also known as Boschetto Gardens) with palmgroves, citrus trees and vineyards. In December and January when the oranges are harvested, their aroma permeates the air. There are several attractively laid-out paths running through the park, which is a popular picnic place for the Maltese – especially at weekends. The snack bar offers cold drinks and light refreshments. On 29 June (Feast of SS Peter and Paul) each year, the Mnarja Festival (*see page 77*) is held in the gardens.

Clapham Junction

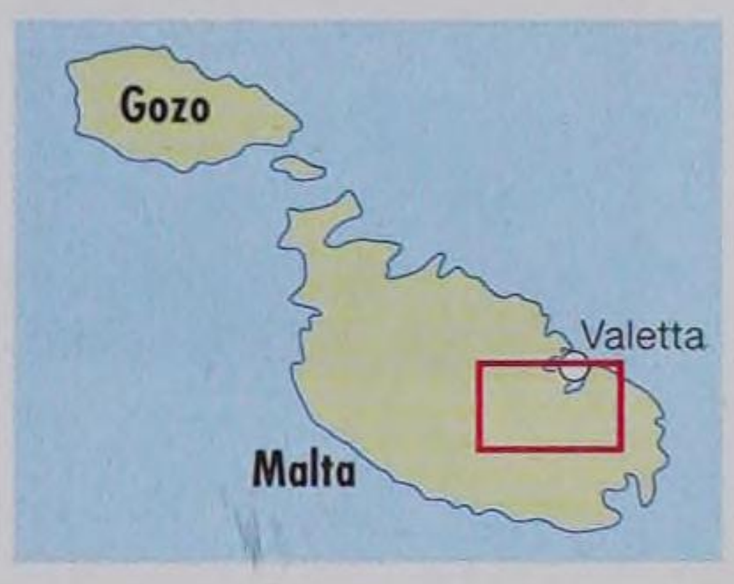
On a small rise at the rear of the gardens is the best example of the mysterious 'cart-ruts' on the whole island, jokingly referred to as **Clapham Junction** (*see also page 74*). Coming from the direction of Rabat, drive through the gardens and stop at the junction after the bridge, next to the Buskett Forest guest house. Those arriving by bus from Dingli (the No 81) should alight at the stop before the bridge. From the crossroads follow Girgenti Street uphill, turn left down the first side-street and follow it as far as the first opening in the wall on the right. A stony track leads up to the famous area of ancient ruts, named after the busiest railway junction in London. Deep, curving double tracks, probably made by some kind of cart or sled, lead down the hill.

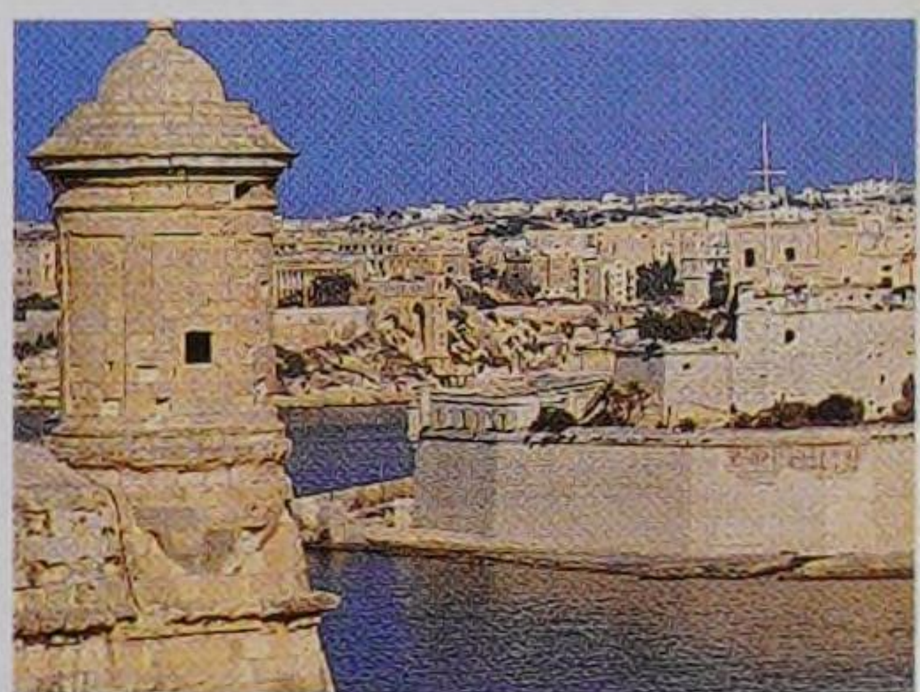
Church of St Lawrence

Route 4

Malta's churches (half a day) *See map page 16/17*

Malta, Christianity's bulwark against Islam, has roughly the same number of churches as Rome – over three hundred, and this route passes several fine specimens hidden away in the island's villages and towns. The route begins at the 'Three Cities' of Vittoriosa, Cospicua and Senglea, which the locals still refer to by their original names of Birgu, Bormla and L'Isla respectively. It was the resistance they showed in 1565 which was largely responsible for the Turkish defeat. The route then crosses the island as far as Mosta, and ends in the town of Siggiewi with its unmistakeably Arabic atmosphere.





Fort St Angelo from Valletta

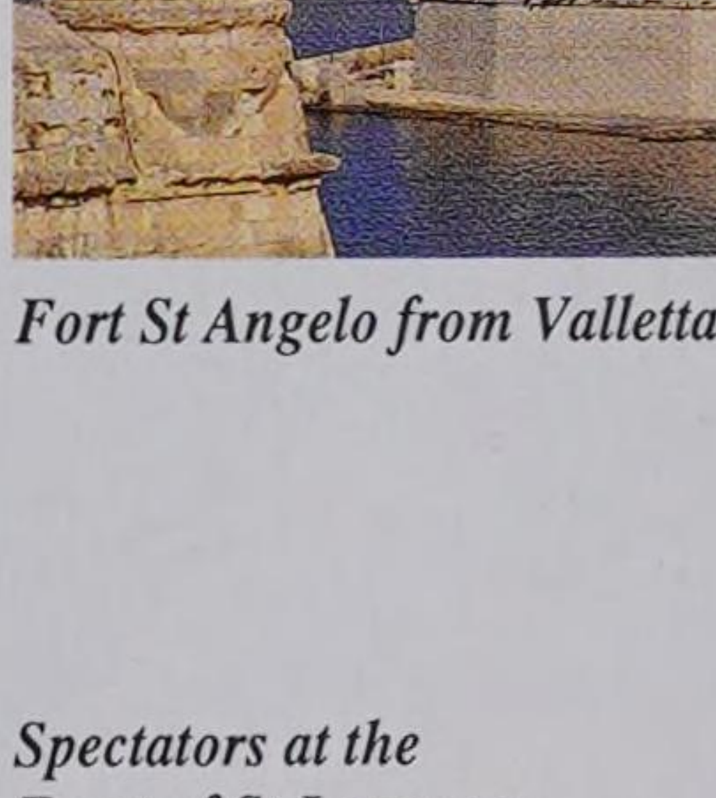
Vittoriosa and Senglea

When the Maltese Islands were ceded by the Spanish throne to the Knights of St John in 1530, the Order chose Vittoriosa Bay with its Fort St Angelo as their main base. The small, deep inlet – today's Dockyard Creek – was ideal in every way for anchoring their fleet.

Originally, **Vittoriosa** was a small fishing community called Birgu. After its heroic defence during the Great Siege of 1565, Birgu was renamed Vittoriosa ('the victorious'). Its past glory is still reflected in the magnificent Feast of St Lawrence procession (10 August), when a silver statue of the saint is carried through the streets.

Vittoriosa occupies an ancient site: Fort St Angelo contains the remains of a Phoenician temple to Astarte. The **Church of St Lawrence** dates back to the 11th century, though the present structure was completed in 1697 by the baroque master architect Lorenzo Gafà. St Lawrence was the Knights' conventual church from 1530 to 1571; the dome was destroyed by bombs in 1942.

Spectators at the Feast of St Lawrence



Ship and painting at the Maritime Museum

From the square in front of the church, the quay leads to the Order's former **arsenal** which used to extend all the way to Fort St Angelo; beneath the bridge leading to the fort, the galley slaves' former quarters can be made out just above the surface of the water. This fort (closed to the public) also served as a prison; it was here that the great painter Caravaggio (1573–1610) was held at the end of his brief stay on the island. The former naval bakery today contains the **Maritime Museum** (winter: Monday to Saturday 8.15am–5pm, Sunday 8.15am–4.15pm; summer: daily 7.45am–2pm), with its collection of model ships from antiquity to the present day, original Maltese boats, tools used for the ancient craft of shipbuilding and also a historic portolan, the medieval navigational chart indispensable to every ship's captain listing the positions and characteristics of major harbours.

St Joseph's Chapel on the left-hand side of the church of St Lawrence contains the **Church Museum** (daily 9am–noon); the hat and sword of Grand Master Jean de la Valette can also be seen here alongside several devotional items.

The square in front of the church opens out into Victory Square (Misrah Ir-Rebha), the centre of Vittoriosa. This is the place to sit and carefully eat some *Mqaret* (*see page 80*) while admiring the half-moon on the grating of the victory monument.

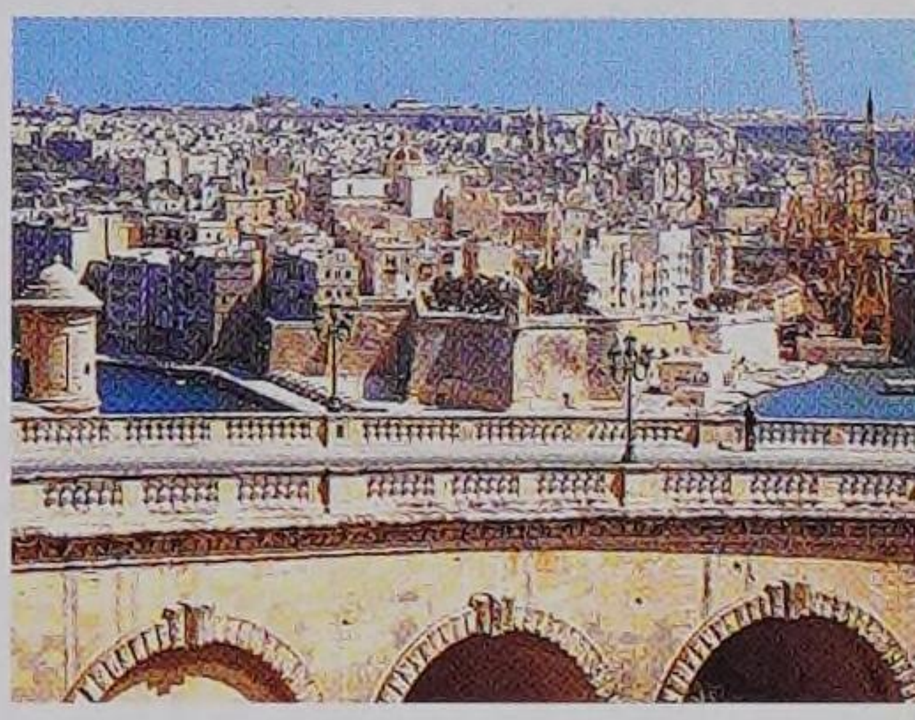
The former **Inquisitor's Palace** lies on Main Gate Street, which connects with the square. This complex building with its many halls and courtyards also contains several prison cells with original graffiti. The large litter in the courtyard was probably reserved for the Inquisitor's private use.

The maze of narrow alleys on the other side of the peninsula contains several plaques marking the locations of

Inquisitor's Palace

the Knights' various *auberges*; Observer Street with its old hospital leads to the fortifications along **Kalkara Creek**. These massive structures are still very impressive even today; they originally protected the Vittoriosa peninsula, the inner part of Dockyard Creek (including Cospicua) and the Senglea peninsula opposite. At the end of the latter is **Fort St Michael** with the famous **Vedette**, a small stone lookout-tower with a view of the entire harbour; the eye and the ear carved into its sides symbolise watchfulness.

Senglea from Valletta



Fort Rinella lies above Rinella Creek in Grand Harbour and faces out to the open sea. This made it the ideal defensive bastion for protecting Valletta and Grand Harbour. The English installed one of two 100-ton cannon here in 1882 when the Italian navy had eight similar weapons on their warships. The range was 7,000 yards (almost 7km/4 miles), and the projectiles could smash a 15-inch-deep hole in steel plate, but the cannon was never actually used in anger. The restored weapon is one of the attractions of a 'remembrance tour' which includes Vittoriosa, the Maritime Museum and a trip on a *dghajsa* water-taxi; it lasts about four hours and can be booked through travel agencies.

From Fort Rinella there's a good view of the **Malta Film Studios**, and the edge of the artificial lake blends in perfectly with the horizon; this was done on purpose so that the life-size copies of historic ships looked as if they were actually on the high seas during shooting. There's still a ship here today – but it's been 'grounded'.

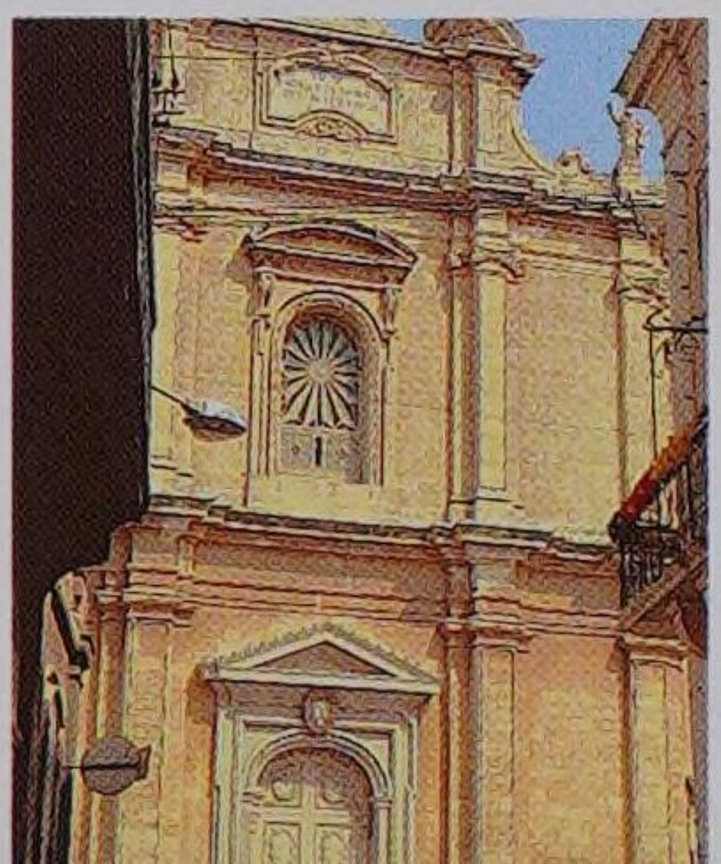
Historic Villages around Valletta

Leave Vittoriosa through the Salvatore Gate (1657) and drive to the town of **Zabbar** (2km/1.2 miles), with its superb Maltese Baroque church of ★ **Ta Grazzia**. The basic structure was designed by Tommaso Dingli (1591–1666), but the church received its present appearance in 1737 when Bonavia's facade was added. The Hompesch Arch stands outside the town on the road to Valletta. It was built in honour of the last grand master of Order of the Knights of St John, Ferdinand von Hompesch (1797–8), a German who gave Zabbar its civic charter.

Zejtun balcony and church

Here the road turns off towards **Zejtun**, a town 5km (3.1 miles) further on, situated above Marsaxlokk Bay which was almost impossible to defend against enemy attack. Zejtun was always the first town on Malta to fall victim to raids, and it was here in the Great Siege year of 1565 that the Turkish fleet first landed.

The ★ **Church of St Catherine** can be seen for miles around; it is considered the masterpiece of the architect Lorenzo Gafà (1630–1704), and was only finally completed in 1720. The structure is a typically solid Gafà

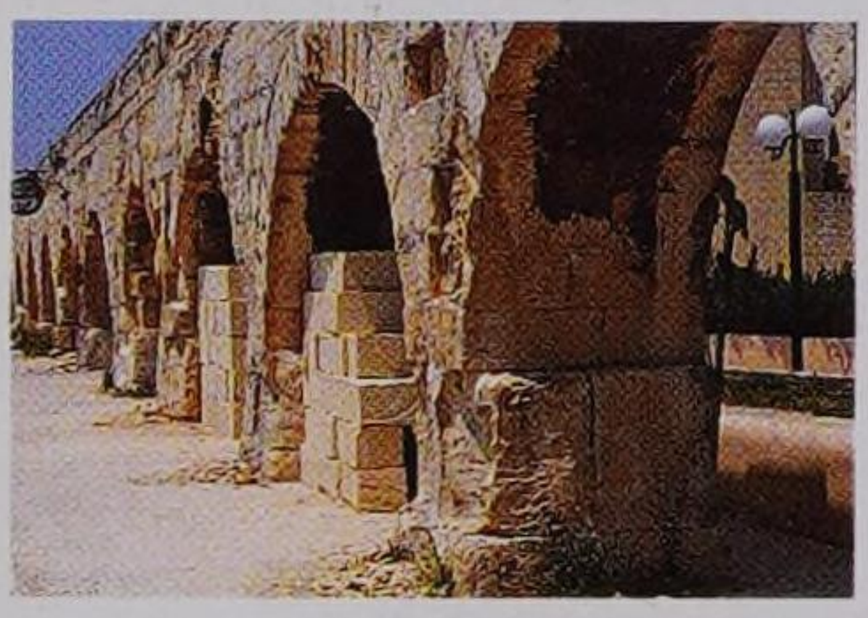


creation, its massive cornices and superimposed buttresses accentuating the horizontal and vertical elements. The giant dome, designed according to the original plans, was added to the church much later, in the year 1907.

The street along the left side of the church leads out of the town; just where it starts to go downhill, the picturesque ★ **Chapel of St Gregory** can be seen, one of the oldest village churches on Malta. This simple rectangular structure dates back to the year 1436; the ruined battlements are a reminder of the danger the island faced from the direction of the sea. Former doors, both filled in, can be seen set into the sides of the building, one with a pointed arch, the other with a round one. The main entrance is embellished by a 17th-century Renaissance portal and bellcot.

From Zejtun continue via Ghaxaq to the airport; around 500 yards from the airport roundabout a small country road leads to the ★ **Chapel of Ta'Bir Miftuh**. This rectangular medieval building also dates from the 15th century, and still has a double-arched Norman-style portal on its right-hand side.

Unhurried locals



The Wignacourt Aquaduct

At the airport roundabout follow signs to Valletta and head for the enormous modern domed church at **Qormi** (16km/9 miles). Qormi is famed for its bakeries; the Pastizzeria Pinto at No 60, Bartholomew Street, just next to the domed church, is a great place to test some fresh *pastizzi*. The enormous domed church stands on a hill and is a very good point from which to get one's bearings; signposting on Malta leaves much to be desired.

Leave Qormi in the direction of Birkirkara, turning left at Santa Venera (18km/11 miles). It was a chronic water shortage in the island's new capital of Valletta which prompted Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt (1601–22) to build the great aqueduct that bears his name. The **Wignacourt Aqueduct** was constructed between 1610–14 to bring fresh water from wells near Mdina to the Grand Master's Palace in Valletta, and still functions today. It follows the old Rabat-Valletta route via Attard, and passes along the northern side of the large escarpment on which Qormi lies.

From the aqueduct it's not far to Birkirkara's ★ **Church of the Assumption**. Follow the aqueduct in the direction of Rabat, turn right at the Toledo building, go back roughly 500 yards, then turn left, and the church of the Assumption is on the right. The mighty Renaissance facade is particularly harmonious, with its massive pilasters and Corinthian capitals supporting the triangular gable. The church was designed by Vittorio Cassar (1550–1610), son of the famous Gerolamo Cassar. The fine stonework on the facade merits closer inspection.

Birkirkara (pop. 20,000) is the most densely populated town on the island. A real highlight of the town is the

★ **Church of St Helena**, a fine example of the Maltese Baroque style. The church was designed by Domenicho Cachia (1710–90), architect of the Auberge de Castile in Valletta, and built between 1735–45; it was this church that persuaded the Knights to give Cachia the commission for the palace in Valletta. Two winding flights of steps lead up to the platform on which the church stands. Apart from the twin-towered facade, the aisle screens and the entablature are striking features of a building which has been described as the finest parish church on the island.

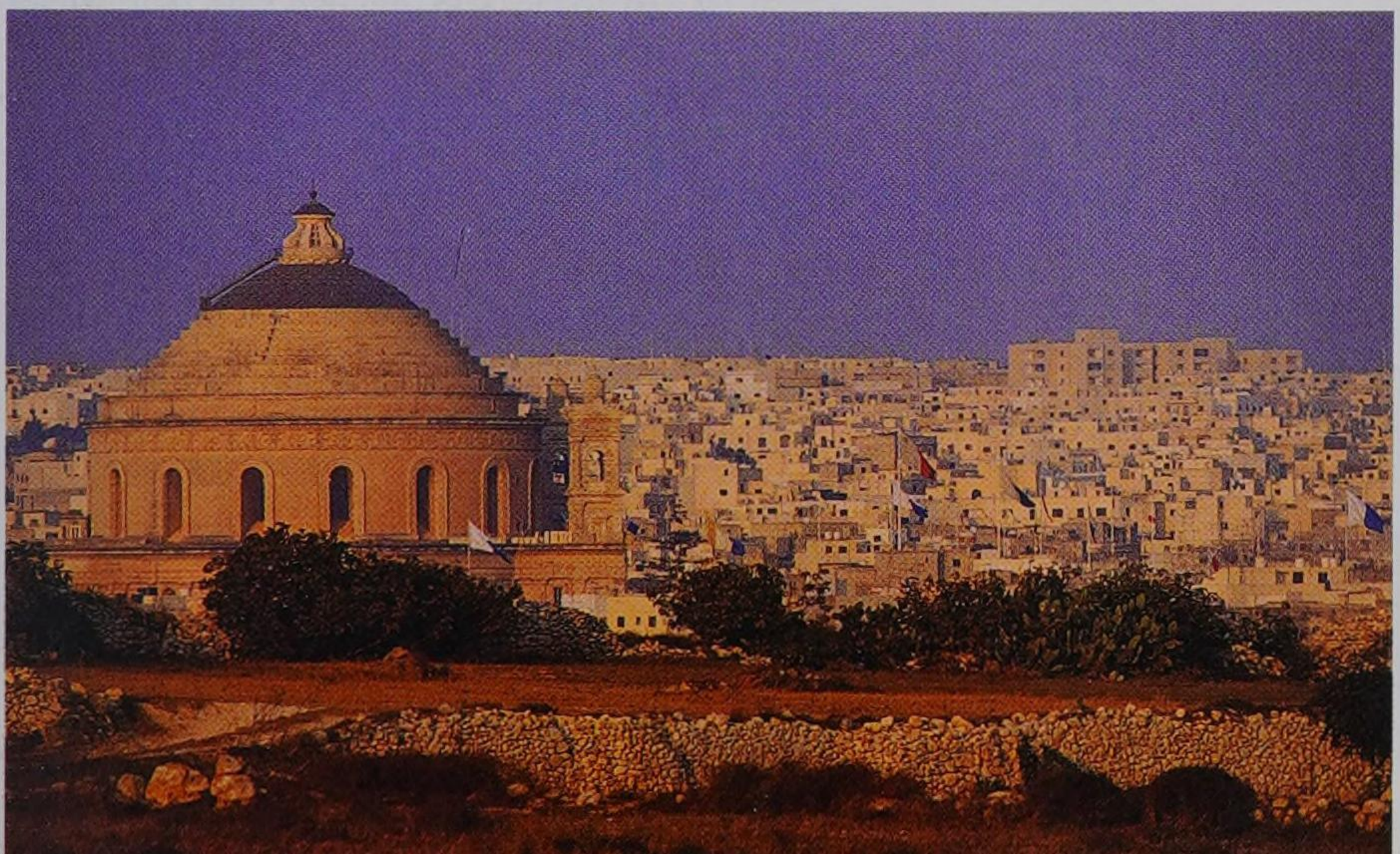
Church of St Helena

The main road westwards from Birkirkara now leads past Balzan, a pretty little town with attractive villas, to Mosta, where the ★ **Church of St Marija Assunta** is one of Malta's outstanding landmarks. It is the largest church on the island, with room for a congregation of 12,000. The architect, George Grognet, based his design on the Pantheon in Rome, and construction work began in 1833. The dome is 40m (131ft) in diameter, making it one of the largest in the world; the lantern is 66m (216ft) high. The entrance hall with its portico and triangular gable is a faithful copy of the Pantheon, but the two bell-towers are a Maltese addition.

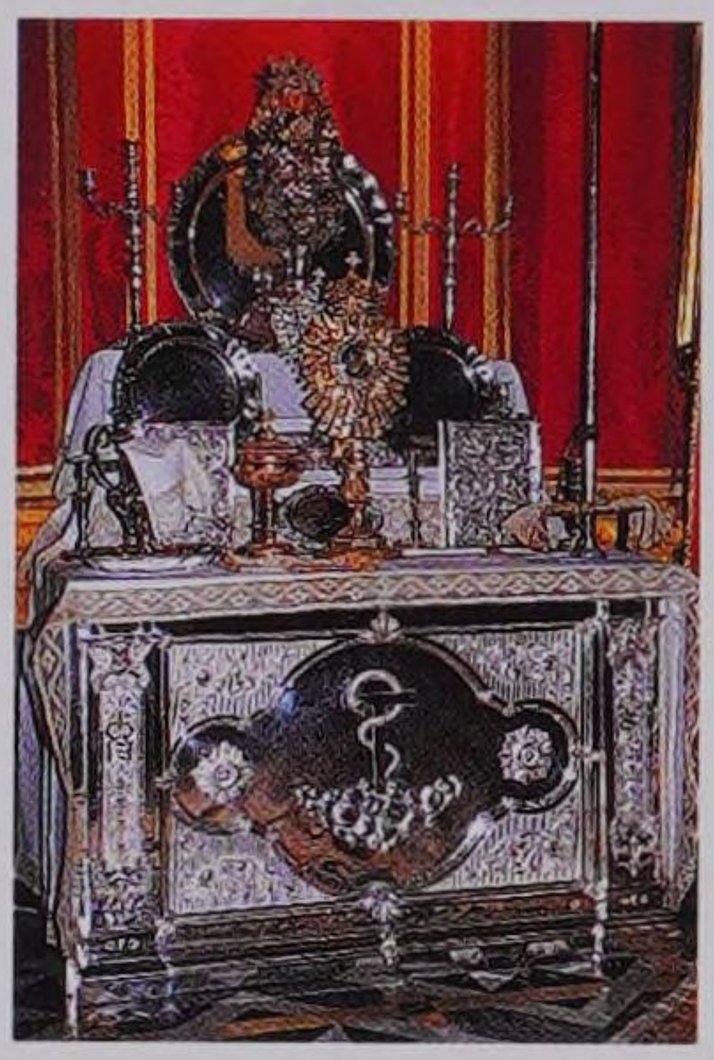
The colourful decoration of the massive interior is traditional Maltese. A true miracle occurred in this church during World War II: an Italian bomb smashed through the cupola during a service, grazed the interior wall and then rolled across the floor – without exploding. No-one was injured. The bomb is now kept in the vestry as a miraculous memento.

There's another magnificent parish church very close by: from Mosta drive back towards Birkirkara; a roundabout appears after 2½km (1½ miles), and a magnificent avenue of oleanders leads off it to the parish ★ **Church of St Saviour** in Lija. The baroque building stands on a

St Saviour's in Lija
Church of St Marija Assunta



The altar of St Saviour's



San Anton Palace gardens

Church of St Philip

platform with steps leading up to it. It is the masterpiece of Giovanni Barbara (1670–1730), and was built in 1794. Inside the church, the vault, dome and semi-dome of the apse are all richly painted.

Between Lija and Attard is the **San Anton Palace**. The very next grand master after Wignacourt (*see page 52*), Antoine de Paule (1623–36), had a country residence built for himself here: a typical French chateau surrounded by parkland. The building was anything but a country retreat, however: over 600 guests could be entertained, and Grand Master de Paule incurred the displeasure of the Inquisitor by the sheer lavishness of his installation dinner here. During British colonial rule the palace was the governor's residence; since 1974 it has been the seat of the president of the republic.

Although the palace itself is not open to the public, the attractive **palace gardens** are (8am–6pm). With their exotic plants and fountains, they are an indispensable part of any visit to Malta. Trade fairs and cultural events are also held at San Anton.

Continue onwards to the centre of Attard and to another Renaissance jewel: the ★ **Church of St Mary** in Attard (21km/13 miles), the first work of the architect Tommaso Dingli (1591–1666). Again, the detailed carvings in the stonework are worth a closer look. The temple-like facade could not support a tower, so in 1718 a bell-tower was placed above the northern transept.

From Attard it's simple to find the road to Rabat. Travel along it for roughly 2km (1 mile) until a track branches off towards the **Ta'Qali Crafts Centre** (Monday to Friday 8am–4pm), housed inside an old corrugated-iron hangar at a disused British military airfield. Carpenters, blacksmiths, weavers, glass-blowers, potters and lacemakers all offer their products for sale here.

From the roundabout below Mdina it's just 2km (1 mile) to **Zebbug**. Leave the bypass at the De Rohan Arch, a neoclassical arch with the memorial to Mikiel Anton Vassalli, the father of Maltese literature, and then drive towards the town centre. At a small roundabout roughly 50 yards from the church square is the Golden Lion Bar. Alongside the usual drinks it also serves petrol until 7pm – an hour later than other garages on the island. The buildings clustered around the parish **Church of St Philip** in the town centre are typically Maltese, with wooden balconies and niches containing statues of saints and fresh flowers.

Though only 2km (1 mile) away, the rural centre of **Siggiewi** is much quieter, despite its enormous baroque parish church of St Nicholas, designed by Lorenzo Gafà between 1675–93. This town has a very Arabic feel to it. Its location on the edge of a ridge gives a seemingly endless view from here across the southeastern part of the island.

Route 5

Prehistoric temples (31km/19 miles) *See map page 16/17*

This route visits the mysterious and unique underground cult site known as the Hypogeum, continuing to the impressive Neolithic temples at Tarxien, Hagar Qim and Mnajdra. It also includes the cave of Ghar Dalam, where the skeletons of long-extinct animals were found, and the 'Blue Grotto', a sea-cavern reminiscent of its namesake on Capri.

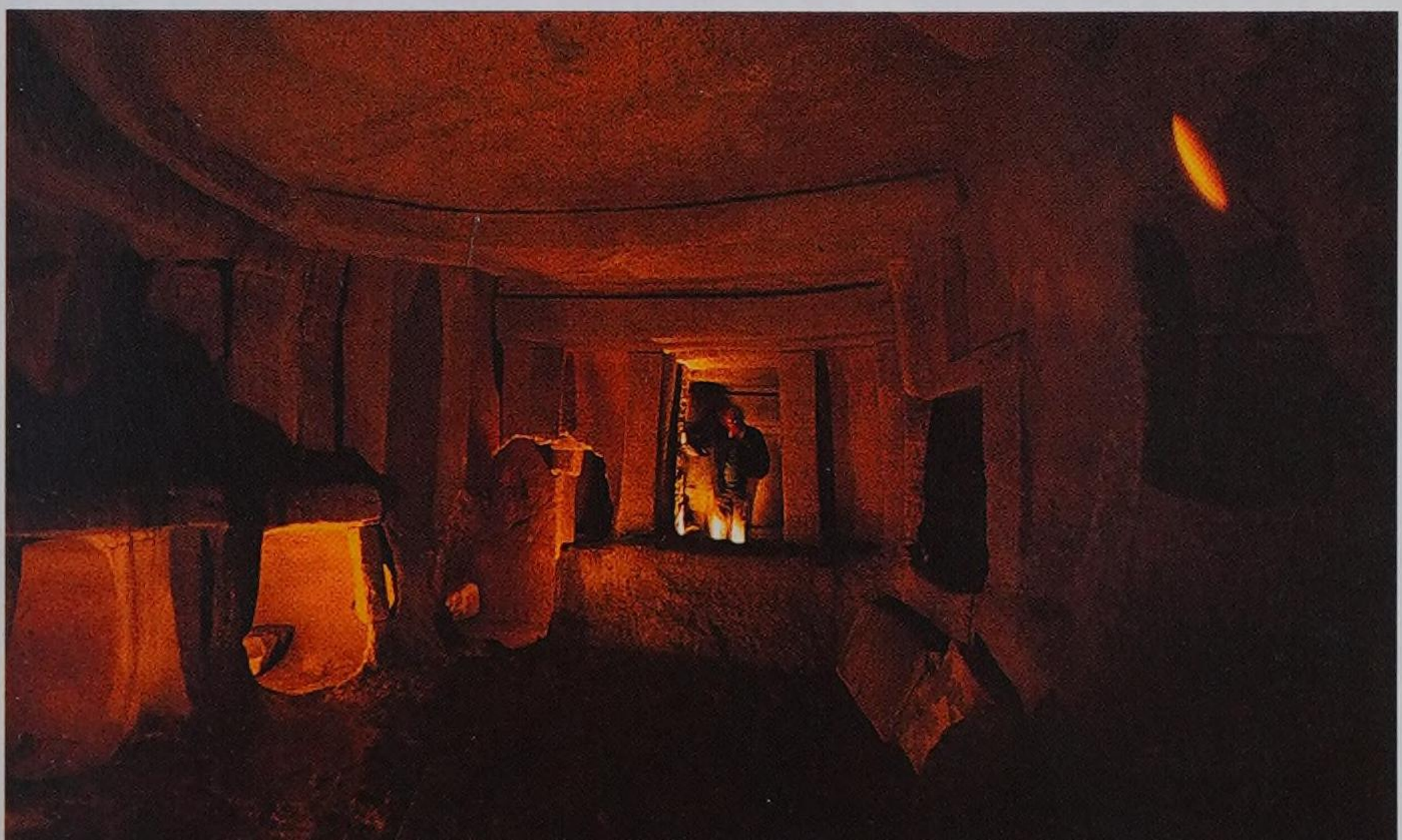
Leave Valletta at the Triton Fountain (bus terminus), travel through Floriana and follow signs to Marsa, the industrial town at the head of Grand Harbour. Along this road there's industry to the left and greenery to the right; it also goes past Malta's largest sports club, Marsa SC (*see page 87*).

Just after the club there's a large roundabout, badly signposted; take the road towards Paola. The next roundabout is only about half a mile further on; here take the exit to Marsaxlokk, ignoring further signs to Paola, a pretty little town with the longest rows of balconies in Malta. To the right of the road, the filigree neo-Gothic church above the cemetery looks almost unreal; at the top of the hill follow the sign to 'Hypogeum' (6km/4 miles).

The ★★ **Hal Saflieni Hypogeum**, an underground burial chamber, was hollowed out of soft limestone in around 3300BC. It was only rediscovered accidentally in 1902 by a group of construction workers who were preparing the foundations of a house, whereupon it was immediately excavated by the great Maltese archaeologist Sir Themistocles Zammit.

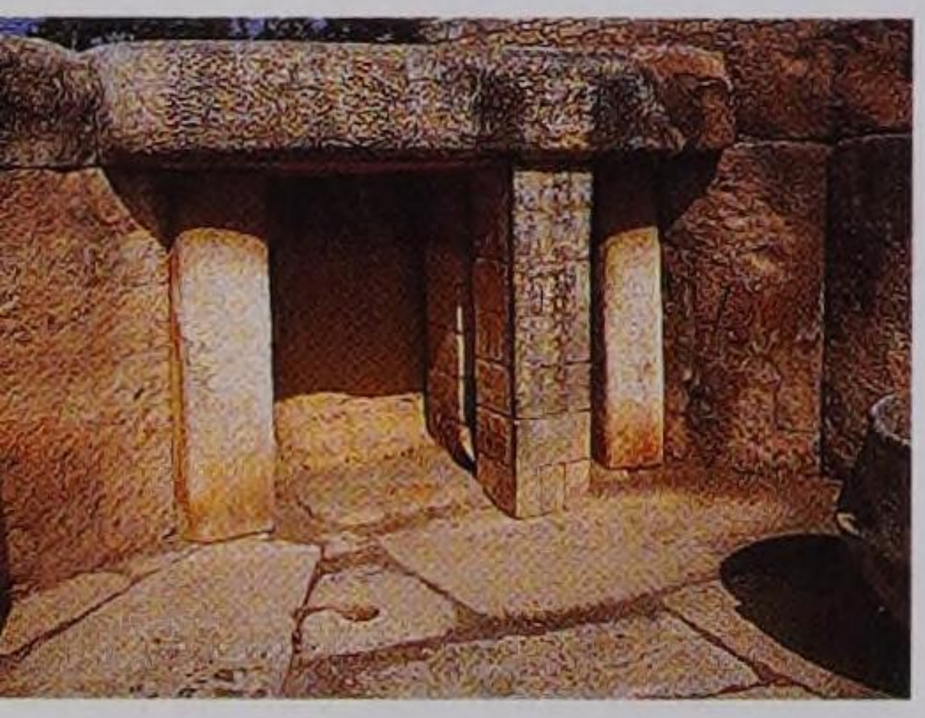
The first level is the oldest (4100–3600BC), and contains several tomb-like structures, where skeletons were

Inside the Hypogeum



found. The second level (3600–2500BC) was used as a temple for fertility rites, a theory supported by the large number of fat divinities discovered here; traces of red ochre on the walls symbolised blood and life and places of sacrifice are still recognisable. The rooms are very large, and contain spiral decoration; the rear section contains a complete temple facade hewn out of the stone. The third and lowest level (3300–2500BC) was mainly used for storing grain. A flight of steps that suddenly breaks off – possibly for some earlier, sinister purpose – and a long corridor lead to the lowermost chambers.

No-one really understands the exact nature of the cult at Malta's underground burial chambers, but it seems to have been based on the notion that the forces of life and growth come out of the earth, the cradle of fertility. Temples inside the earth itself were hence a means of making closer contact with these forces, embodied in the *Magna Mater*, or Earth Mother. The rite was also connected with the cycle of the seasons and the reawakening of fertility. Since votive figures of the 'sleeping priestess' were discovered in the Hypogeum, it is generally thought that priestesses made oracular pronouncements here while in some kind of trance. The many rooms also seem to point to the fact that the initiated slept here too. Use of the place as a burial chamber would thus seem unlikely – but skeletons have been found. The whole sanctuary was in use for two thousand years, and the cult must have undergone several alterations during that time; the Hypogeum may have been used as a burial chamber at first, and only later as a religious site. Public access to the Hypogeum is restricted at present.

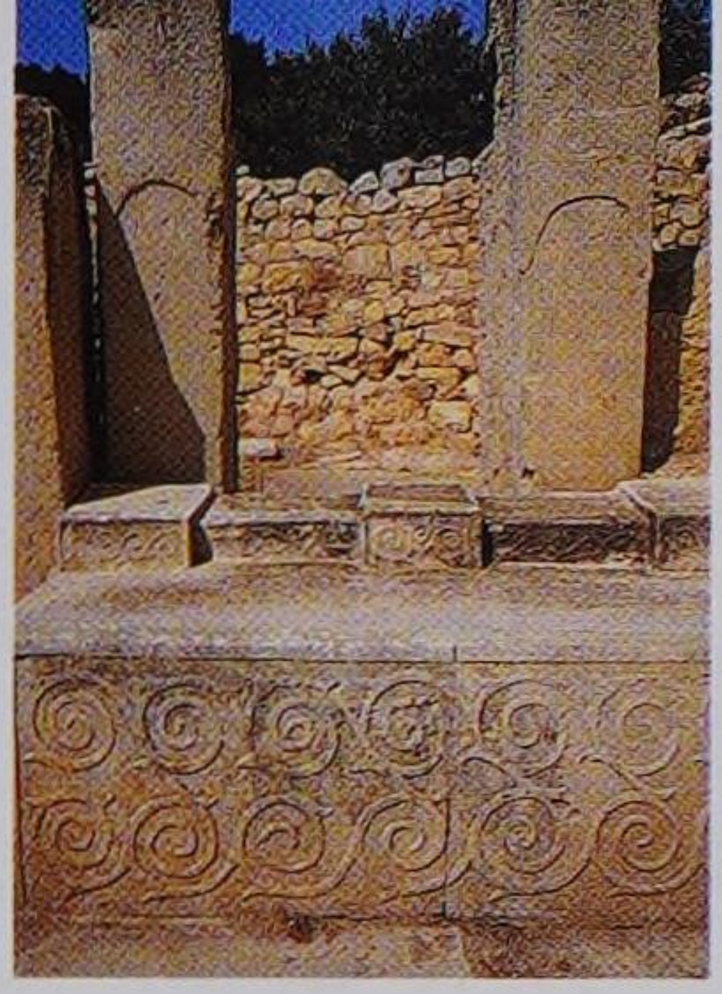


Tarxien Temples

Not far away (roughly 1km/½mile) is the largest known temple complex on Malta, signposted 'Neolithic Temples'. The ★★★ **Tarxien Temples** (Monday to Saturday 8.30am–4.30pm, Sunday 8.30am–3.30pm) were built between 3800BC and 2200BC. This temple complex is the best-preserved on Malta, and consists of three massive temples apparently built one after the other, possibly for space reasons; they all have a series of confusing antechambers. The main reason the temples are in such good condition is because they were discovered only relatively recently, in 1914.

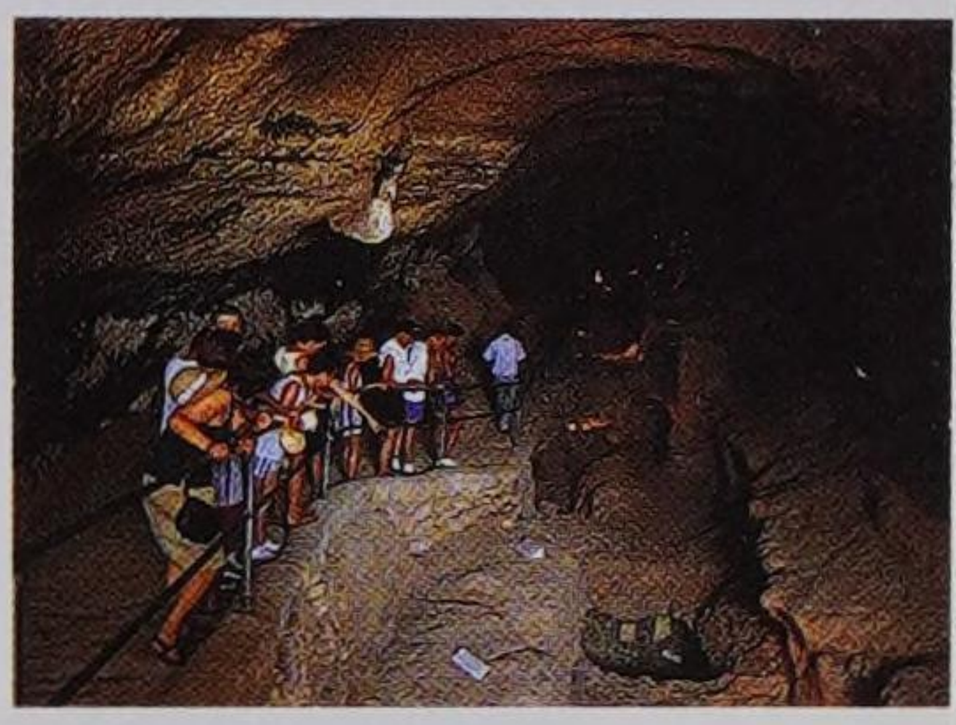
At the entrance to the complex are the remains of the torso of an oversized, probably female figure which must originally have been around 3m (10ft) tall; the worship of a mother goddess of fertility certainly played a large part in the cult, and these fat divinities seem to have represented her. The decoration on the walls and altars consists very often of spirals, the symbols of time and eternity; the friezes depicting animals are connected with sacrifi-

cial rites. The carvings in the stone reveal a high degree of skill, as do the reliefs and also the treatment of the stone used in construction. Nothing remains of the original roof of the complex, which may have collapsed because of an earthquake. Holes in the stone were possibly supports for doors with rope hinges, or curtains, and the ones near the altar for securing sacrificial animals. The remains of a clay pot and a circular patch of burnt floor also survive as a reminder of these sacrificial rites. It is unclear whether the pitted pattern on some stone slabs was purely decorative or had some symbolic significance. The rooms also seem to have been used for meditation and oracular purposes. The original finds from Tarxien are on display in the Archaeological Museum in Valletta; the exhibits here at the site are all copies.



Spiral wall decorations

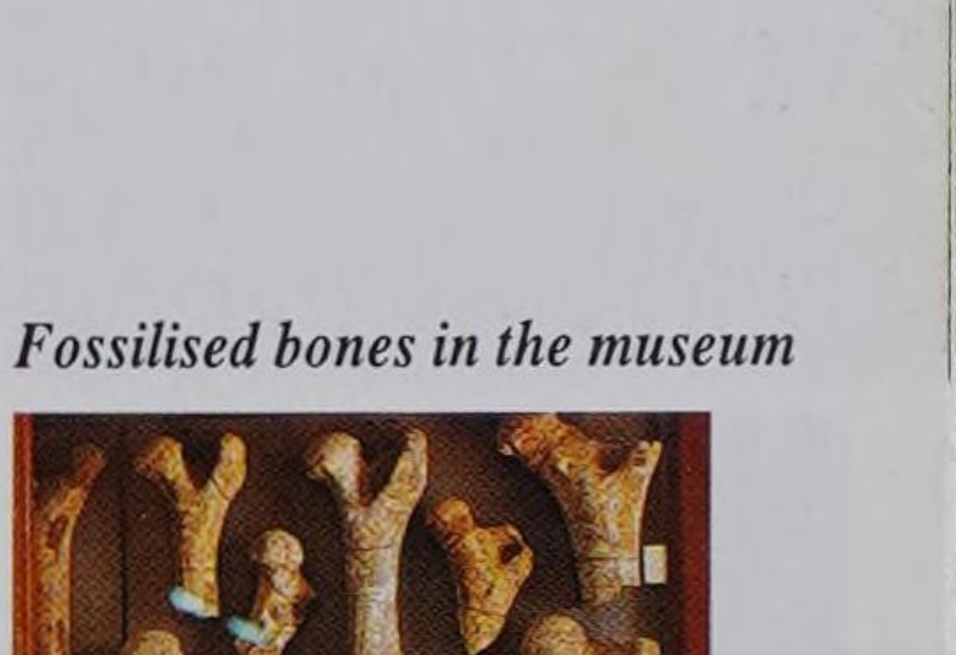
The road to the next stop on this route, Birzebbuga, goes uphill gradually; once the blue cranes at the new harbour come into view over the horizon, the prehistoric cavern and museum of **Ghar Dalam** (10km/6 miles) (Monday to Saturday 8.30am–4.30pm, Sunday 8.30am–3.30pm) can be found on the right-hand side of the road. This 'cave of darkness' was first discovered in 1865 by an Italian professor, Arturo Issel. The grotto is part of a subterranean river and is roughly 200m (650ft) long; the layers of rock date right back to the earliest days of the planet. The upper rock stratum yielded skeletons of men and animals dating back to the Phoenician period (1st century BC); the second one dates from Neolithic times (5200–4500BC) and contained fragments of pottery with animal patterns, imported pieces of obsidian from Lipari and Pantelleria, and the remains of domestic animals. But it was the third layer of rock that yielded the most fascinating finds: it dates from the Pleistocene era, and contained the fossilised skeletons, antlers and teeth of deer, bears, wading birds, hippopotami and dwarf elephants which must have been alive when Malta was still part of a land-bridge between Europe and Africa; several similar fossils have also been discovered on nearby Sicily. The finds are on display in the museum at the cave entrance.



Exploring Ghar Dalam cave

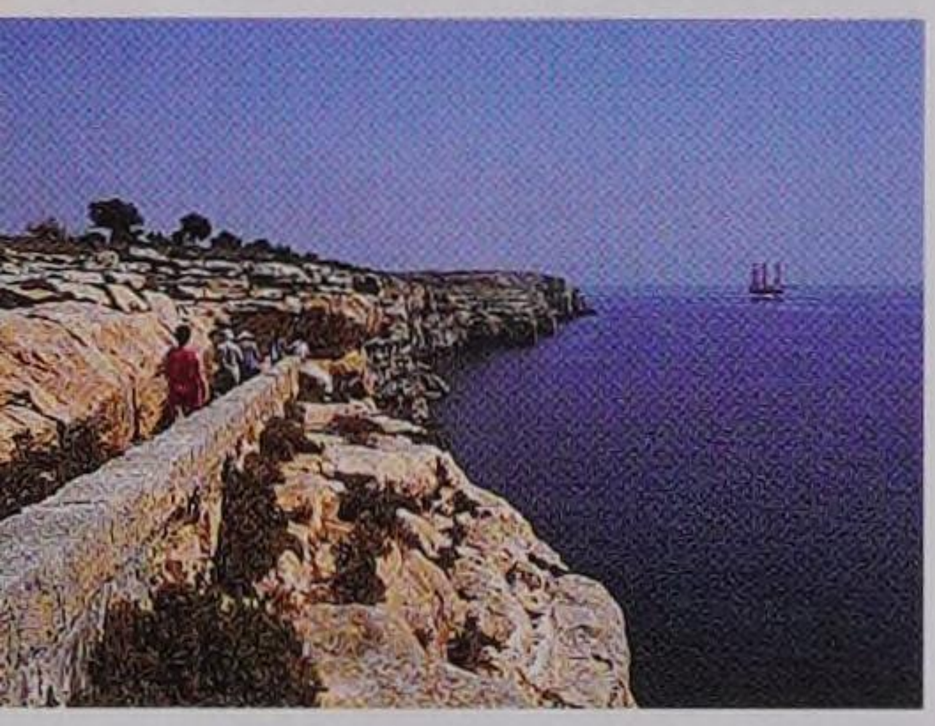
Fossilised bones in the museum

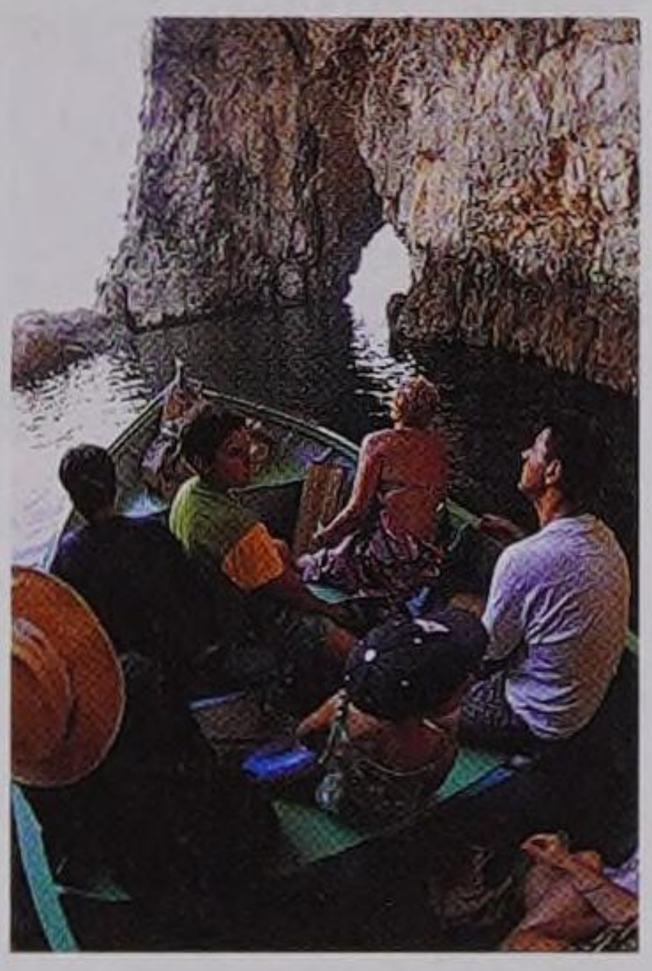
The road continues to a small headland with a chapel, in Birzebbuga (11km/6 miles); a few steps inland from here is the Bronze Age site of **Borg in-Nadur**. The coast road goes past the monument to George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev, who ended the Cold War on 23 December 1989 on a cruiser moored in Marsaxlokk Bay, before continuing along the edge of **Pretty Bay** towards the Kalafrana container terminal, one of Malta's most important sources of income next to tourism. Even though it still has a sandy beach, Pretty Bay no longer lives up to its name on account of the panorama.



The panorama at Pretty Bay

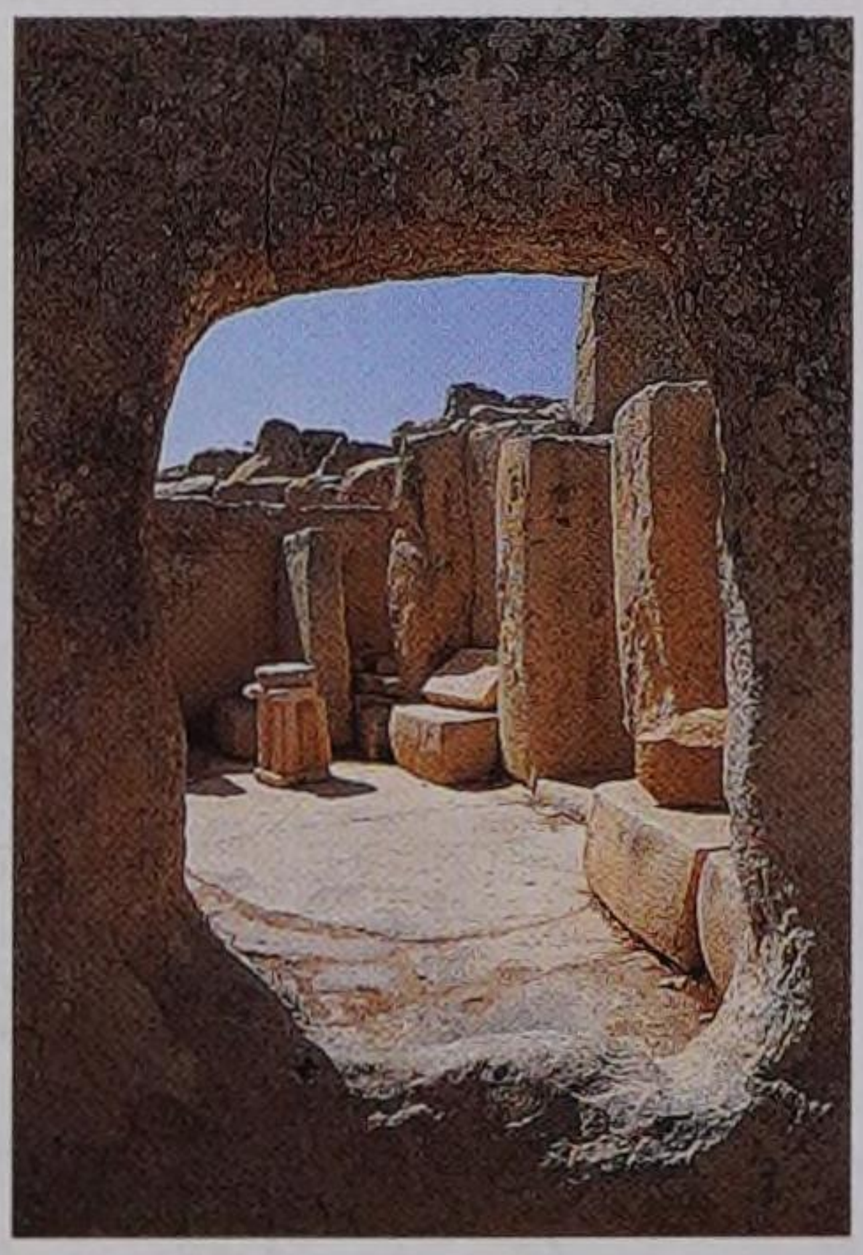
The entrance to Ghar Hasan





Tour to the Blue Grotto

Hagar Qim



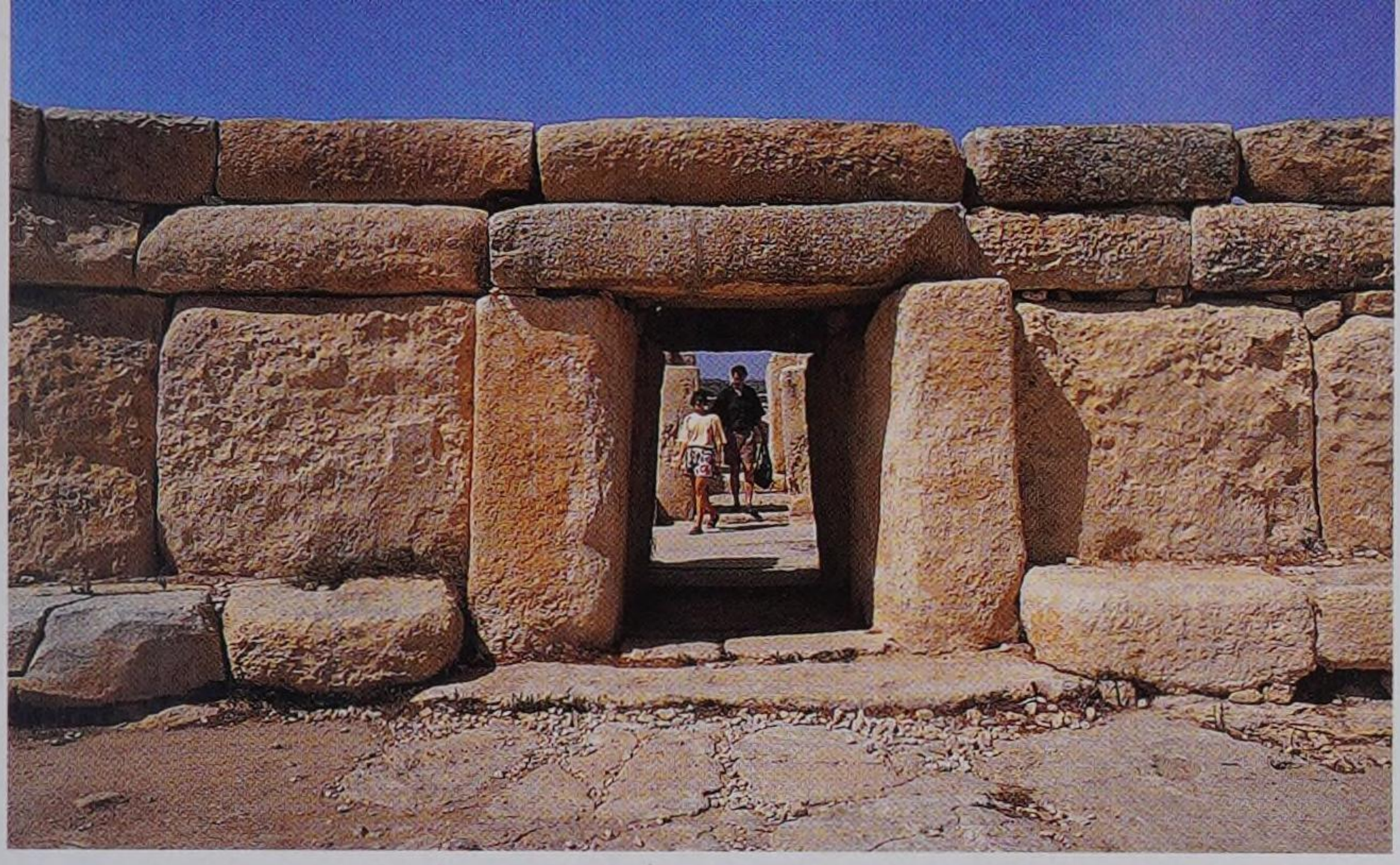
Just before Kalafrana the road turns inland and passes through a region of Malta that is rapidly becoming one vast industrial estate. A turn-off leads back to the coast, away from all the warehouses and factories, and to the grotto of **Ghar Hasan** 17km (10 miles). It is very picturesquely situated high up in a steep rock wall above the ocean. The cave is said to have been used by a Saracen hiding to avoid expulsion in 1120; the contrast of blue sky, craggy coastline and garishly-coloured offshore platforms here is strangely attractive.

Travel back to the main road and continue along it a bit further through the industrial area, passing the former Hal Far Airfield which was very important during World War II. The landscape starts getting gentler now: fields and stone walls appear, with cacti and prickly pear. Keep left, and soon **Zurrieq** (25km/15 miles) comes into view, a traditional farming village in which the Calabrian painter Mattia Preti (1613–99) spent 30 years of his life. His masterpiece was the vault of St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta (*see page 23*), but the parish church in his village also contains two fine altar paintings by him in its transepts, both executed in the style of Caravaggio.

Take the road to Wied-iz-Zurrieq now, passing magnificent oleander bushes and typically Maltese terraces, as far as the car park on the coast next to the **Blue Grotto** (27km/16 miles), which is not as large as the one on Capri but not as crowded either. Below the car park, the colourful fishing boats (8 passengers) sail into the grotto: the water is crystal-clear right down to the sea-bed, and the play of light here is best in the early morning. The boat trip takes around 25 minutes.

Back on the main road, turn left; it's not far now to the ★★★ **Temples of Hagar Qim and Mnajdra** (31km/19 miles). The site of these two megalithic temples is spectacular, high above the sea with the island of Filfla in the distance. Hagar Qim is almost completely surrounded by a wall, with three massive standing stones set into it. The site was discovered and excavated in 1839; the *Maltese Venus*, the statue of the *Seated Woman* and several other female figurines were all found here and can now be admired in the Archaeological Museum in Valletta. The monumental entrance facade is exceptionally impressive, and gives a good impression of the sheer scale of these megalithic structures.

A corridor leads inside; the interior is made up of a series of round chambers, almost all of which have their own entrance. Hagar Qim (the name means 'standing stones') consists of six large temple areas. The mushroom-shaped altars were constructed with raised sides, possibly to stop the sacrificial blood from dripping off the edge.



The temple complex is almost 5,000 years old

At the eastern end of this temple complex, which was built in around 2800BC, is a massive slab of stone, the largest ever used for temple architecture on Malta: it is 6m (19ft) long, 3m (9ft) wide, 0.6m (2ft) thick, and weighs around 57 tons. On the interior wall at the southwestern entrance, the feet and calves of two figures can be seen as part of a relief – believed to be the remains of a gigantic painting of the mother goddess.

Roughly 500 yards away to the west are the **Temples of Mnajdra**, which were built earlier. They belong to the 'Ggantija phase' and have been dated to around 3700BC. The badly-reconstructed eastern temple consists of just one chamber and is thought to be the oldest; the two-chambered temple attached to it is probably the most recent section. The southern complex is the second-oldest, but also the most interesting of all. According to a recent theory these temples – like the circle at Stonehenge – fulfilled some kind of calendary function. The main entrance faces east, and during the spring and autumn solstice the first ray of sunlight falls on a stone slab on the rear wall of the second kidney-shaped chamber, while during the winter and summer solstice it touches the corners of two stone pillars in the section connecting the two chambers.

The first chamber to the left of this connecting section contains a niche decorated with a carefully executed pitted pattern – a distinctive feature of Mnajdra. One chamber in the outer wall to the right of the entrance contains a particularly attractive pillared altar; the small holes connecting with the main room can be closed off, and probably served some oracular purpose.

The two kidney-shaped chambers at the main entrance and in the connecting section were created with particular care. Today we talk of the precision of watchmakers; the precision of the calendar people of Malta over 5,000 years ago may have been just as famous.

Temples of Mnajdra

Popeye Village

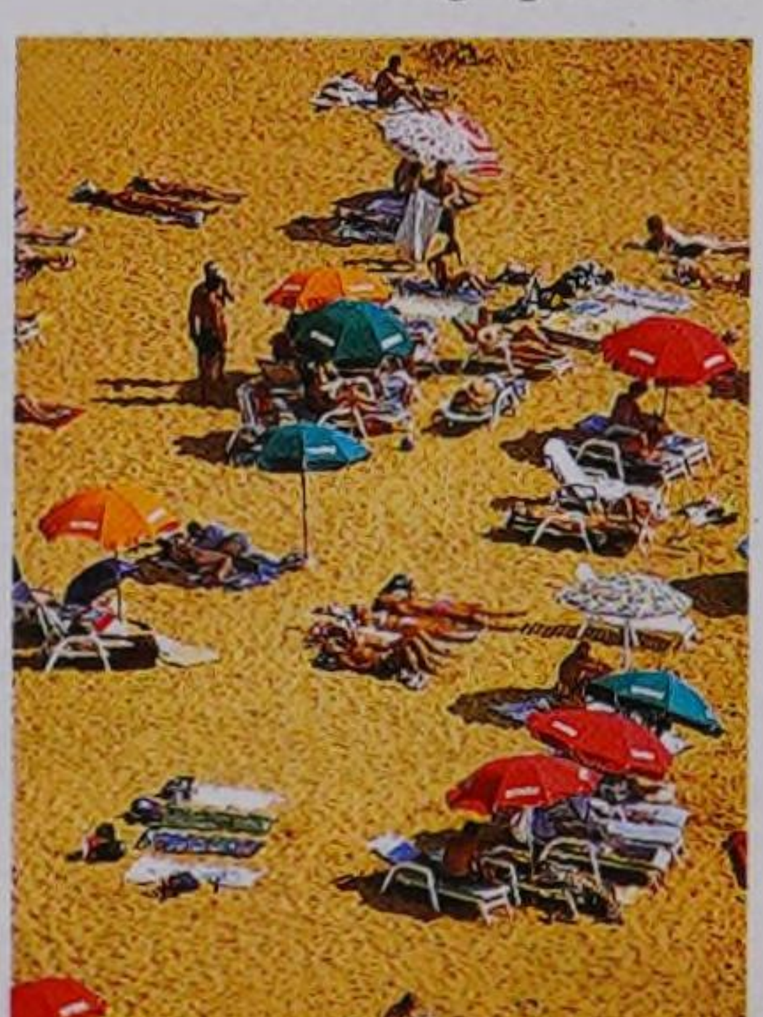
Route 6

The south coast (66km/40 miles) *See map page 16/17*

This route leads to the bays and beaches of Malta's south coast. Even though there's less tourism here, they are every bit as attractive as their counterparts in the north. The deep valleys that lead to the sea from the Dingli plateau are ideal for hikers, and are a good place to leave the car and get some exercise. To the south of Rabat the route arrives at the coast once more and continues via the idyllic swimming resort of Ghar Lapsi and the quarry region to the bays of Marsaxlokk and Marsaskala.

At the Mellieha Bay roundabout (near the Seabanks Hotel) turn inland; the road curves slowly round to the right, and a side-road branches off in the direction of Anchor Bay and the **Popeye Village** (2km/1 mile). Here a fishing village was built into the natural landscape as the set for the film *Popeye*, directed by Robert Altman in the late 1970s and starring Robin Williams. The green valley next to Anchor Bay, the film village and Mellieha church on the rise slightly inland form a harmonious ensemble. There's a small admission fee to the village.

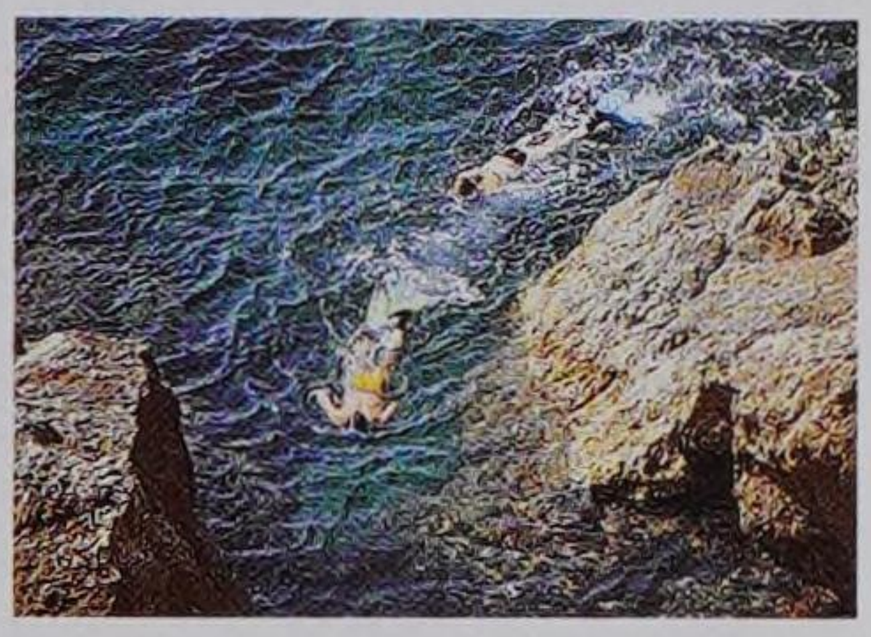
Soaking up the sun



Head back for the main road now and turn right, bypassing the town of Mellieha; at the first roundabout follow signs to Ghajn Tuffieha. The tiny road gradually ascends the Mellieha Ridge and provides a good view of the rugged south coast. It then leads through the valley before climbing once more to Badja Ridge, which is crowned by a modern round church. Turn sharp right and sharp left now, and the signpost to 'Golden Bay' points the way down into the fertile St Paul's Valley, where the road ends up at two sandy beaches below.

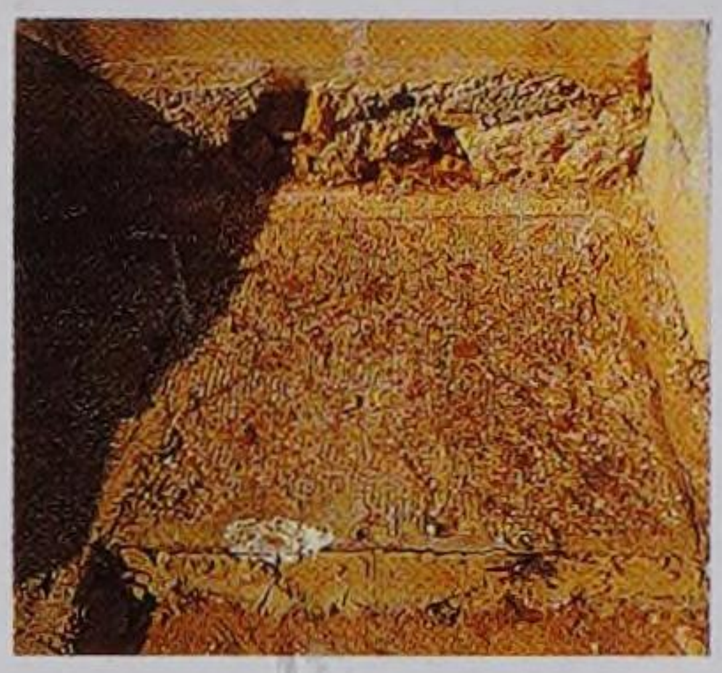
Golden Bay (7km/4miles) itself looks like something straight out of a holiday brochure, with its yellow sand, deck-chairs, parasols, car park, restaurant terraces and water sports to suit all tastes (rowing boats, motor boats, pedal boats, sea-sausage riding and the obligatory trip to the Blue Grotto). Watch out when the sea is rough, however: the undertow here can be strong. On the other side is the idyllic bay of **Ghajn Tuffieha**, best viewed from the old lighthouse on the ridge between the two bays. Here there are just a few pedal boats waiting to be hired, nothing else; cars need to be parked some distance away because the bay can only be reached on foot.

Be careful of the undertow



Drive back a few hundred yards and take the first turn-off to the right; after about half a mile a signpost points the way to the **Roman Baths** (Monday to Saturday 10am–4pm, Sunday and public holidays 10am–noon). They were discovered here in 1929 after a nearby freshwater spring was traced to them; it fed the original Roman baths. The lady attendant (who needs a tip) shows visitors the old changing rooms and then the *tepidarium* (sauna), both of which still have well-preserved floor mosaics. Opposite are the remains of the *caldarium* where the water was heated; beyond it are the latrines which were cleaned by running water. The *frigidarium* (swimming-pool) is situated beyond the caldarium.

Roman baths

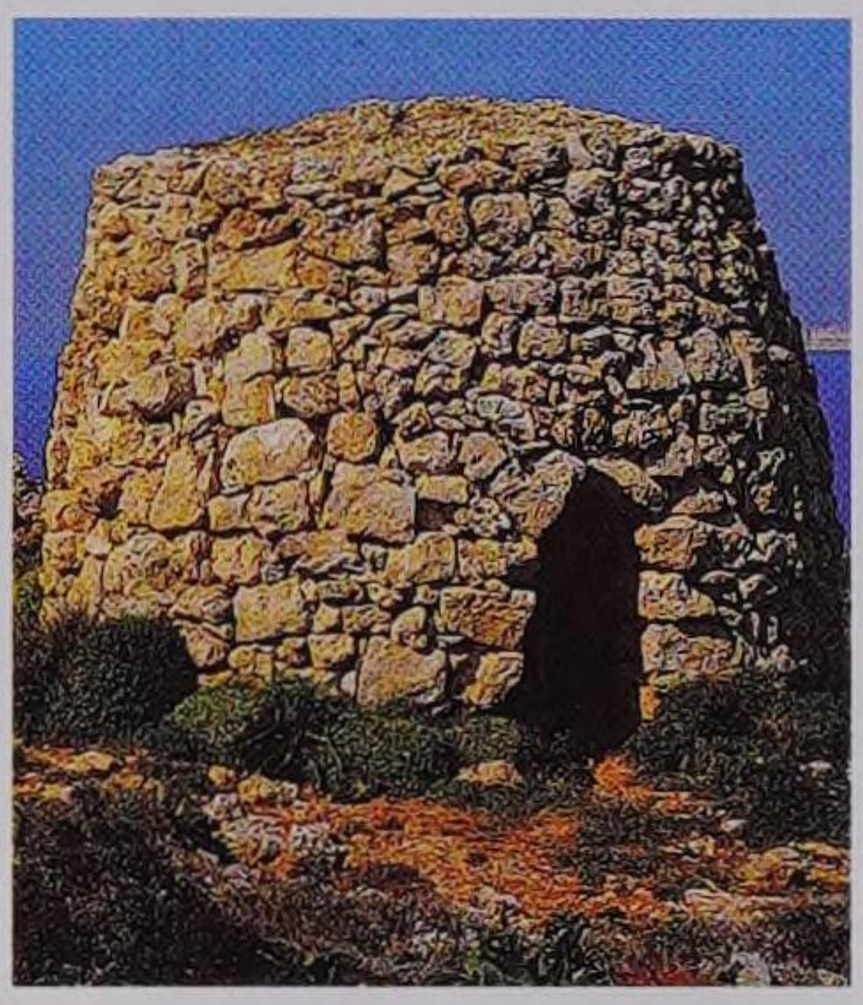


Back on the main road again, the signpost to Mgarr and Gnejna Bay appears after about a mile. Drive through Mgarr whose domed church can be seen from as far away as Mellieha Ridge, and then descend to **Gnejna Bay** (15km/9 miles), a mixture of sandy beach and rocky coast. This bay is very popular with the Maltese at weekends and on public holidays; at other times it's mostly deserted, although there is a kiosk dispensing basic necessities. Water sports are also available. On the left-hand side of the bay, a series of doors in the rock-face can be made out; they are Maltese 'lockers' containing fishing or swimming equipment. Keen hikers should definitely climb up to Lippia Tower above the bay and enjoy the superb panoramic view of this section of coastline. Back in Mgarr there is a very popular restaurant called 'Charles' on the square in front of the church which offers some delicious *Fenkata* menus *(see page 79)*.

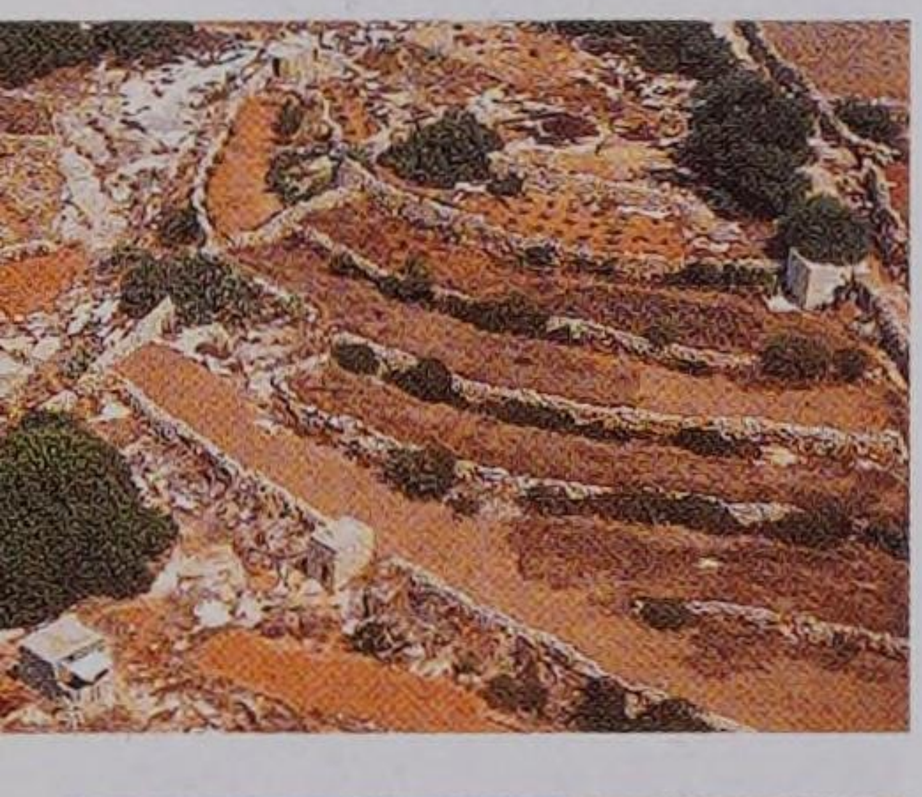
Carry straight on in the direction of Zebbieh now, with its Skorba Temples (usually kept locked), and at the end of the village take the small road off to the right in the direction of **Bingemma** (not signposted). The road leads through the valley and then along the base of the escarpment surmounted by the **Victoria Lines**, a series of forts built by the British at the turn of the century. From the chapel there is a panoramic view extending as far as the north coast. The ravines of the Bingemma Gap contained

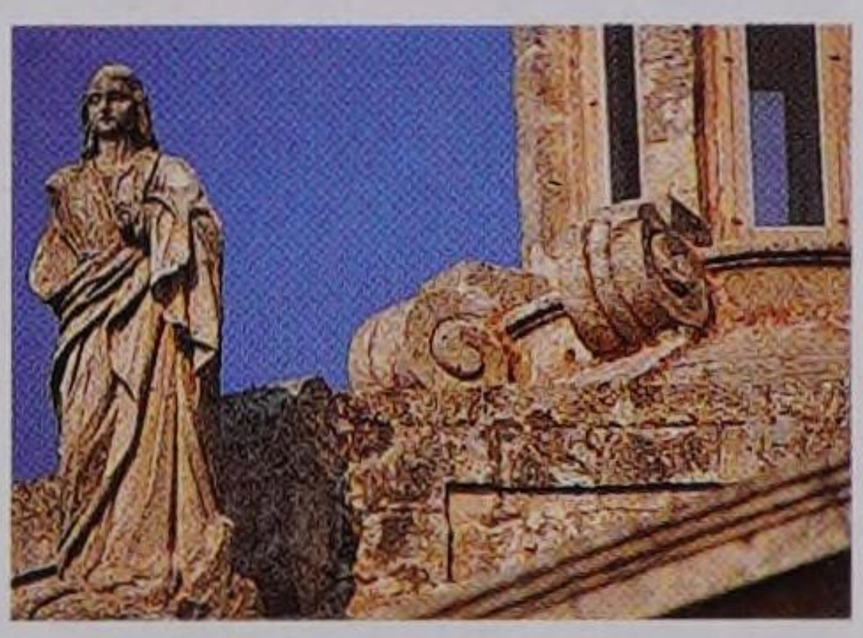
Victoria Lines

This girna dates back to the Bronze Age



Terraced fields above the Dingli Cliffs





Madonna Tal-Providenza

prehistoric settlements, some of which have been dated back to the Bronze Age. At the next crossroads (by the stone bus shelter) turn right to Bingemma Fort. In the field right next to the road, just before the fort appears, there is a ★ **girna** – a small hut only slightly higher than a man, dating back to the Bronze Age. It has a self-supporting dome, and is an architectural masterpiece.

Go back to the junction now and turn right on to the old road that descends from the Victoria Lines into the valley until it reaches the Ghajn Qajjied roundabout south of Rabat. Just before the roundabout (22km/13 miles) there's a turn-off to Mtahleb. The road curves quite a bit, and all the smaller ones branching off it lead over the high ridge to the steep rocky cliffs above the sea. There are some ancient farms here dating back to the 10th century, and also several gardens and terraced fields; the whole region is absolutely perfect for hiking.

At the roundabout take the exit signposted to Dingli; the road crosses the southern suburbs of Rabat and then connects with the Rabat-Dingli road. Turn right at the junction; the road leads through an agricultural area to the town of Dingli with its domed church, situated high up on a plateau and visible for miles around. Follow the sign to **Dingli Cliffs**, leave the village and keep right at the last fork in the road (the left turn is signposted to Buskett). A narrow road, leads upwards and along the steep coast; after a few bends the asphalt stops (30km/18 miles). Get out of the car at this point, walk another hundred yards or so up the stony path, and there's a dizzying view above the sheer drop here of around 250m (800ft) down to the sea.

Back at the previous junction, now follow the sign to Buskett; the road runs parallel to the coast, above the Dingli Cliffs. Pass a radio station, and on the right-hand side of the road the Madalena Chapel comes into view; from here there's a superb view of the uninhabited island of Filfla, which was used for target practice until 1970 by the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. It has a unique species of lizard and has been declared a nature reserve.

Soon the coast road turns inland, and the Verdala Palace *(see page 47)* comes into view. Ignore the signpost to Rabat and keep right until the sign to Ghar Lapsi appears; follow it and carry straight on towards the **Madonna Tal-Providenza**, a wonderful baroque building.

The road leads back to the coast again now. At the last fork take the right turn and travel past quarries and a seawater desalination plant to the natural harbour of ★ **Ghar Lapsi** (44km/27 miles). This is a real pirates' cove from the story books: a small round bay on a steep coast, a narrow inlet with the open sea beyond and steps cut out of the rock in the small harbour, which only has room for a couple of boats. The crystal-clear water here is ideal for

Luzzu fishing boat at Marsaxlokk

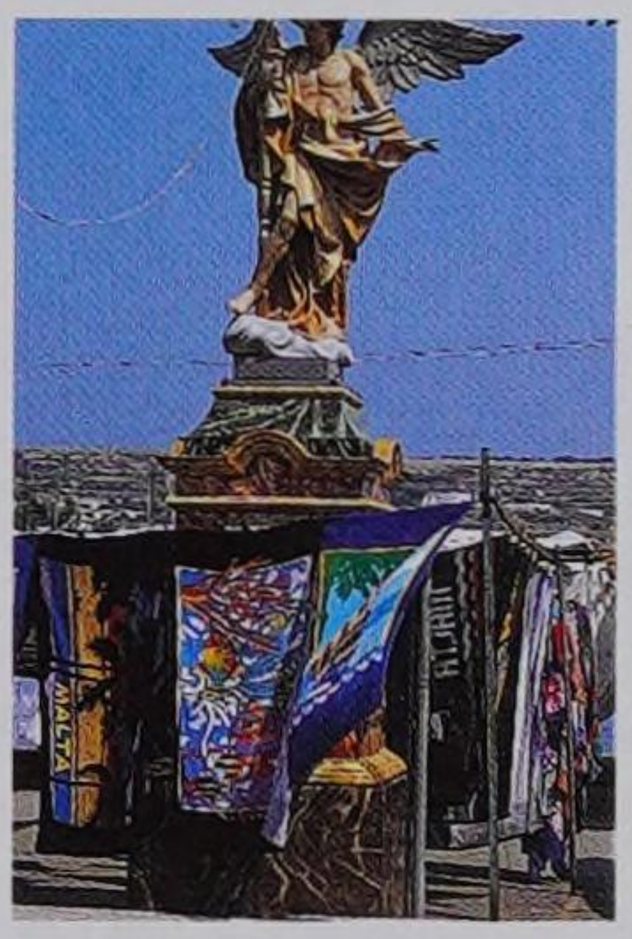
divers, and even if 'Carmen's Bar' is closed, the 'Lapsi View' restaurant up by the car park is sure to be open.

Leave Ghar Lapsi, travel back via Tal-Providenza and at the roundabout south of Siggiewi follow signs to Qrendi. Drive through the quarries now; there are steep slopes left and right of the road. In Qrendi (the temples of Hagar Qim aren't far away, *see page 58*) signs to Luqa and the airport start to appear; go through the underpass, stay on the road leading to Zejtun, and leave it at the junction signposted to **Marsaxlokk** (60km/37 miles).

Marsaxlokk is the prettiest fishing village on the island and is also home to Malta's largest fishing fleet. The harbour with its colourful *luzzu* fishing boats is a must for photographers. A market is held on the quays here daily. The fish is freshly-caught, of course. All sorts of other food is available, too: don't forget to buy some freshly-pickled Maltese capers (*see page 84*) and try the delicious *Mqaret* (*see page 80*). Clothes, household goods and souvenirs complete the picture.

Marsaxlokk Bay had quite a tough time of things historically: it was here that the Turkish fleet anchored in 1565, just before the Great Siege of Valletta, and the bay was also used by the French in 1798. From Fort St Lucian, situated above the bay on the right, the Maltese put up brave and fierce resistance, but it was hopeless.

The road to Marsaskala leads past terraced fields, with low stone walls protecting the valuable soil from wind erosion. On top of the hill, St Thomas's Bay gradually comes into view; its small sandy beach is very popular, and the rocky cliffs contrast nicely with the blue of the sea and the sky. Most of the bathers come here from the nearby tourist resort of **Marsaskala** (66km/41 miles). Hundreds of apartment buildings have been constructed around St Thomas's Tower in this small harbour town, and it's hard to imagine that this place was once a quiet fishing village.



Marsaxlokk market is held daily

MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Salt Pans
Marsalforn Bay
Marsalforn
Ramla Bay
Calypso's Cave
GOZO
N
0 1 mile
0 1 km
Zebbug
Ghammar
Xaghra
Bin Gemma
Birbuba
Ta' Pinu
Ninu's Cave
Ghasri
Xerri's Grotto
Ggantija Temple
Ta' Hida
Qala
Gharb
Nadur
San Lawrenz
Ta' Dbiegi
Gran Castello
Wardija
Channel
Valletta
Azure Window
Inland Sea
Victoria (Rabat)
Gozo Heritage
Ghajnsielem
Fungus Rock
Fontana
Xewkija
Mgarr
Comino
Dwejra Bay
Kercem
Ghajn il-Kbir
Xewkija Dome
Fort Chambray
Blue Lagoon
Comino
Munxar
Sannat
Wignacourt Tower
Xlendi
Xlendi Bay
Ta' Cenc
North
South Comino Channel
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Malta

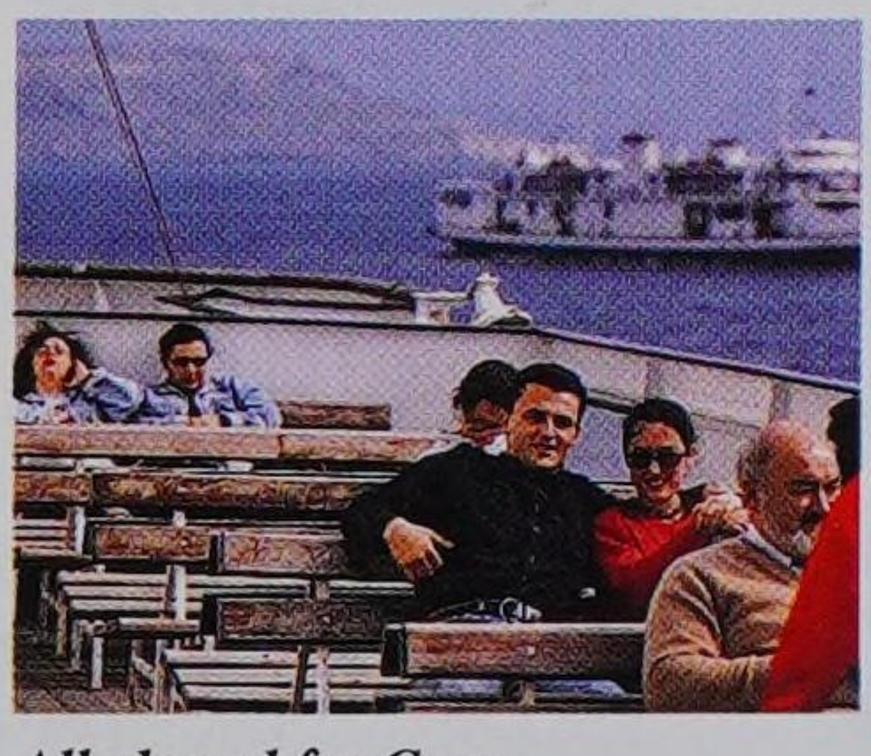
The marina at Mgarr

Route 7

Gozo – the Island of Calypso

Visitors to Malta should definitely try to include a visit to the two other inhabited islands, Comino and Gozo, on their trip. The little island of Comino has a proud population of three, one police station and an 'airport' (only a helipad, in fact). There's one hotel and an idyllic bay, and a visit here takes around half a day (ship connections from Cirkewwa/Malta and Mgarr/Gozo).

To get to know Gozo properly, it's best to allow at least a couple of days – there's no shortage of places to stay.



All aboard for Gozo

Gozo, known to the Maltese as *Ghawdex*, is only 14km (9 miles) long and 7km (4 miles) wide, but even though it resembles Malta geologically its landscape seems gentler, probably because of its numerous fertile valleys and fewer sharp contrasts. Gozo has only 26,000 inhabitants (just one quarter the number on Malta), and its main sources of income apart from tourism are agriculture and handicraft. The goat's cheese rolled in peppercorns known as *Gbejna* is a delicious speciality, and bobbin lace-makers can be seen at work all over the place. The coastline is mostly rocky, and falls steeply to the sea along its southern section. There are sandy beaches near Marsalforn, Xlendi and in Ramla Bay; Fungus Rock and Xlendi Bay are also very popular with divers. Gozo has been referred to, not without justification, as the 'Ireland' of Malta.

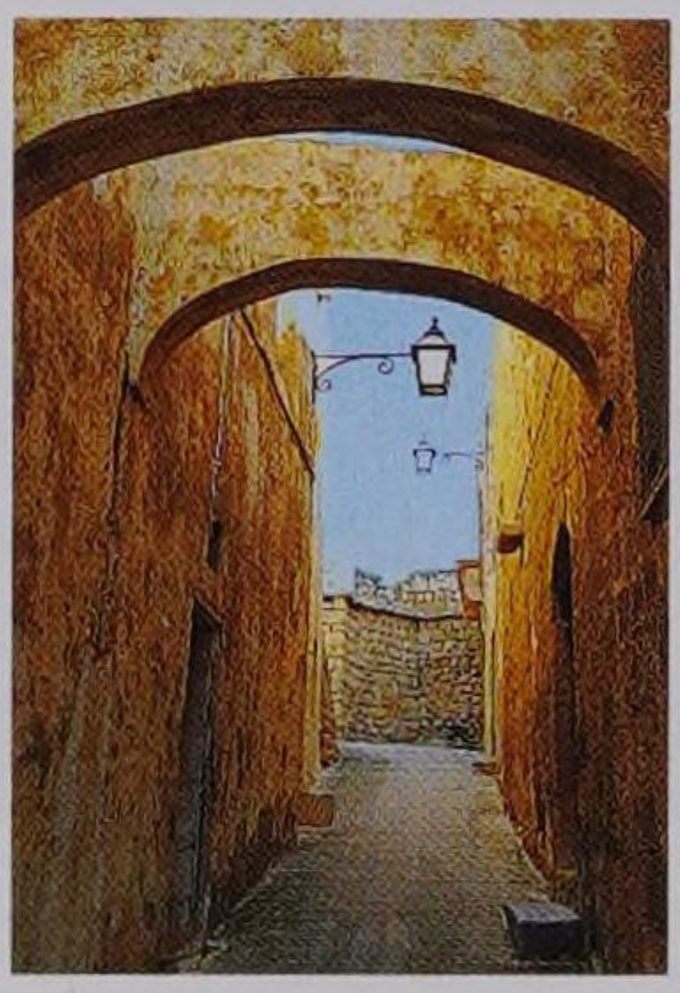
Gozo's Ggantija Temples are the best-preserved on the islands, and the Archaeological Museum in Victoria proudly documents 7,000 years of history. The Ta'Dbiegi Craft Village contains a full assortment of different craft products, and the Folklore Museum in the Citadel in Victoria contains several interesting historic craft exhibits.

History

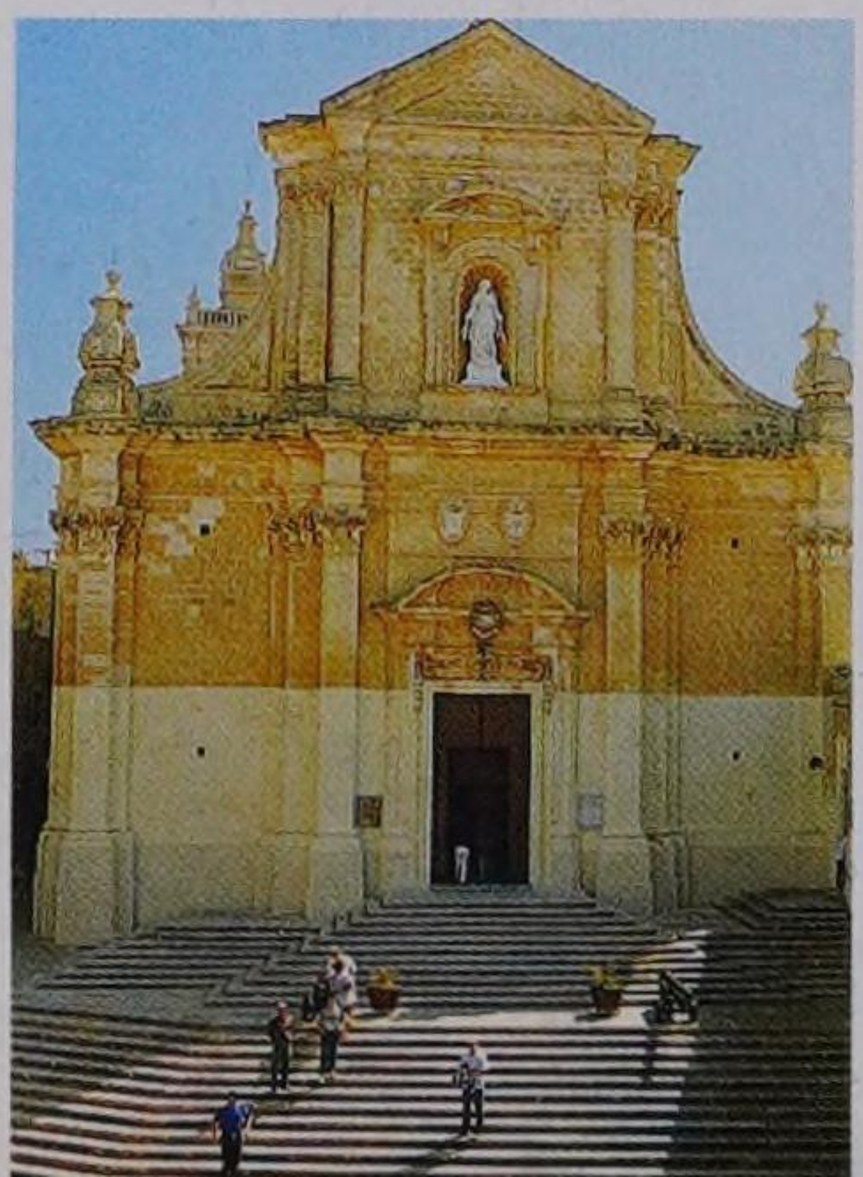
The history of Gozo is the same as that of its larger neighbour, with just two exceptions. The first was the nightmare year of 1551, when corsairs from Djerba (Tunisia) attacked the island and enslaved almost the entire population, after failing in an assault on the Knights of St John. This attack by the notorious pirate chieftain Dragut Reis speeded up the fortification work that was being carried out by the Knights, who had arrived on Malta in 1530.

The other historical exception is mythological. The Greek hero Odysseus is said to have enjoyed the attractions of the nymph Calypso here on Gozo for a full seven years. Her grotto is magnificently situated above the golden sands of Ramla Bay.

Mgarr waterfront



Inside the citadel
The cathedral



From Mgarr to Victoria

The big ferry boats dock at the village of Mgarr, where the local fishermen's brightly-coloured *luzzu* boats bob up and down in the harbour. The neo-Gothic **Church of Our Lady of Lourdes** towers above the settlement, and on the headland is Fort Chambray, built in the mid-18th century by a French knight. The enormous modern neoclassical church in Ghajnsielem is made of golden Maltese sandstone, and is a mixture of almost every known European architectural style: French Gothic flying buttresses, a single-tower facade, and a high dome very similar to the one in Mdina on Malta.

A few miles along the road to Victoria is the **Gozo Heritage Show** (daily 10am–5pm), a rather kitschy audiovisual introduction to the island's history from the Stone Age to the present.

Further along the road to Victoria the large church of **Xewkija** can't be missed: its dome is one of the largest in Europe, and was financed by contributions from Gozitan emigrés after World War II. Then the island's capital, **Victoria**, comes into view; it is also known by its old Arab name of Rabat, meaning 'city'. The fortified ★ **Citadel** stands on the site of an antique acropolis, and the streets below are very lively and busy – Victoria is Gozo's main shopping and trading centre.

Republic Street, which leads into the city, rises slightly just before it reaches Independence Square (It-Tokk), where a market is held on weekdays (clothing, lace products). Turn left here to the picturesque old town, where the **Basilica of San Gorg Martiri** houses a copy of Bernini's altar in St Peter's in Rome. A right turn leads up towards the citadel. An archway leads to the square, where 31 steps lead up to the harmonious baroque facade of the ★ **Cathedral**, designed by the Maltese architect Lorenzo Gafà in 1697. The facade bears the coat-of-arms of Grand Master Perellos. On 15 August one of the most important

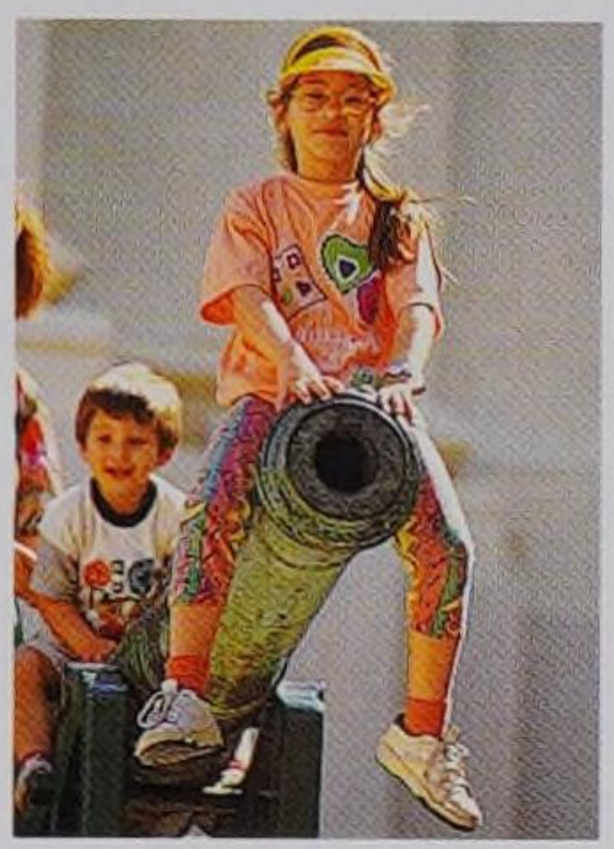
events in the year, the Santa Marija Festival, is celebrated in the area around the cathedral, complete with decorated streets, processions and a firework display.

From the square in front of the church a gateway leads directly to the Palazzo Bondi, housing the ★★ **Archaeological Museum** (1 October until 15 March Monday to Saturday 8.30am–4.30pm, Sunday 8.30am–3pm; 1 April until 30 September Monday to Saturday 8.30am–6.30pm, Sunday 8.30am–3pm). The ground floor contains exhibits documenting the Ggantija temple epoch (4000–2500BC) and the high stage of development reached by the Neolithic people on the island; this epoch ended at the beginning of the Tarxien phase. The exhibits on the first floor are of Punic, Greek and Roman origin. The glass amphorae (1st or 2nd century BC) are a rarity; there is also the 12th-century tombstone of a young Arab girl, Majnuna, with a touching inscription.

To the left of the museum building, a flight of steps leads up to the bastions of the citadel; it's worth taking a short walk up here to admire the panoramic view of the island. The inner section of the bastions, formerly used for storing weapons and munitions, has today been converted into a shopping arcade which leads up to the entrance of the **Crafts Centre** (1 April until 30 September 8am–6.45pm; 1 October until 31 March 8am–4.45pm, closed Sunday and public holidays). The old walls here contain a collection of glassware, pottery, wrought-iron goods and cuddly dinosaurs; on the first floor there is a loom and a variety of lacemaking equipment.

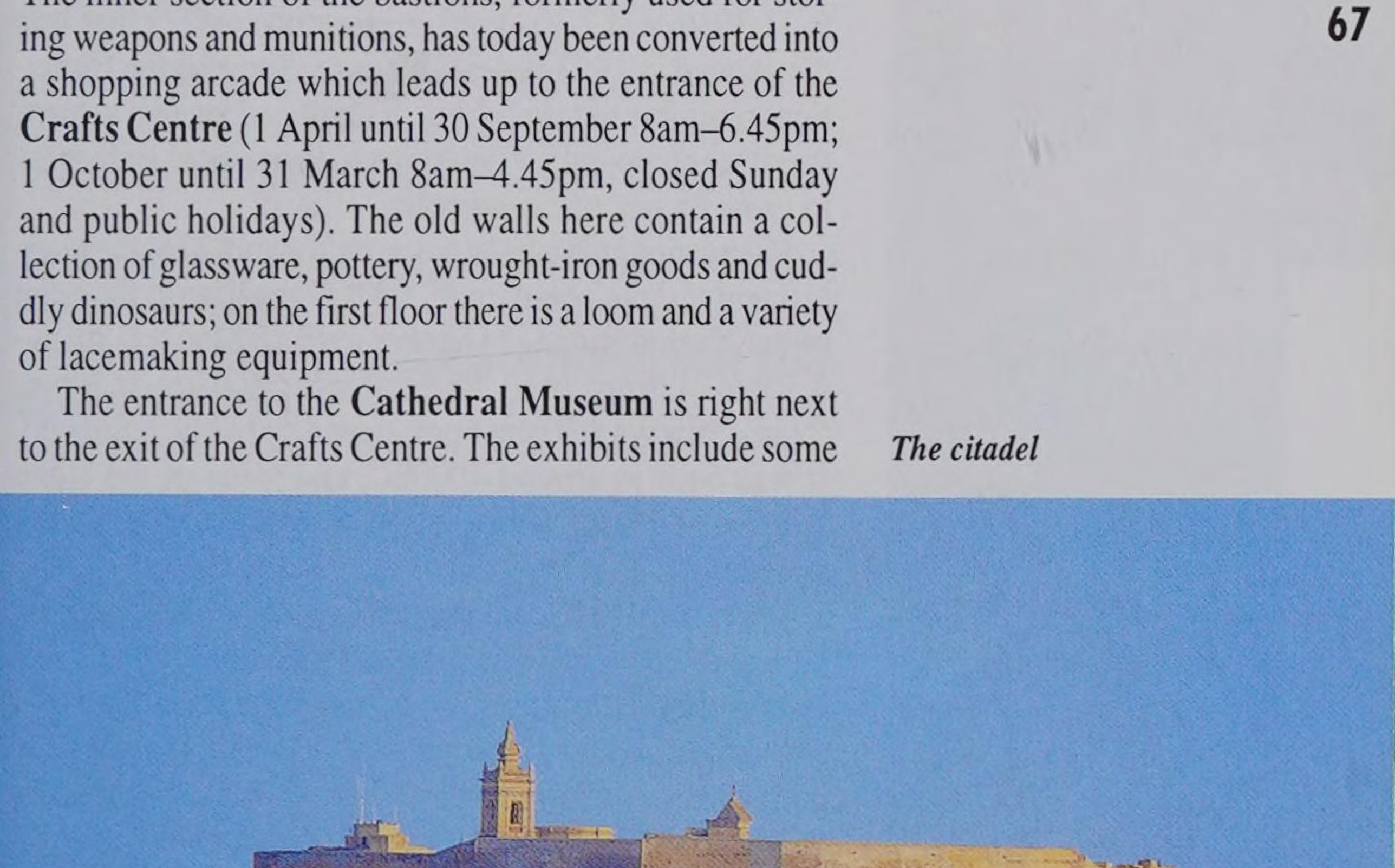
The entrance to the **Cathedral Museum** is right next to the exit of the Crafts Centre. The exhibits include some

Kids like the cannon



Enjoy the view from the bastions

The citadel

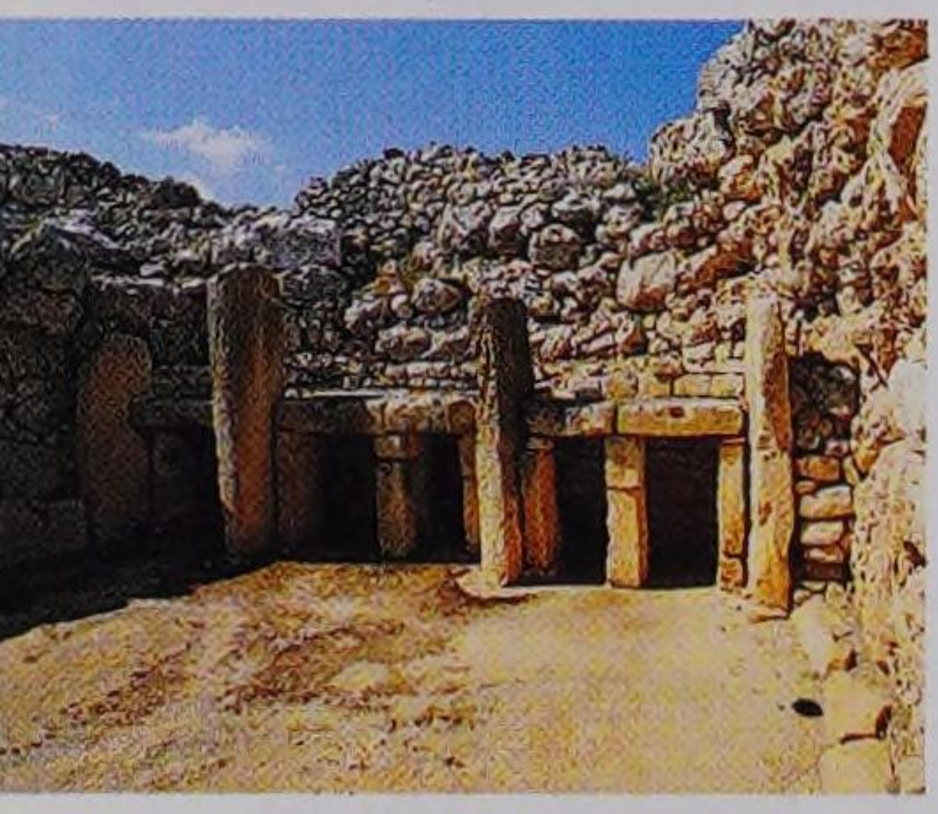


excellent silverwork as well as an ancient carriage; on the first floor, the fine view of the town is preferable to the paintings on display.

The citadel is still in need of much restoration work, but one building that has already been admirably renovated is the ★ **Folklore Museum** (1 October until 15 March Monday to Saturday 8.30am–4.30pm, Sunday 8.30am–3pm; 1 April until 30 September Monday to Saturday 8.30am–6.30pm, Sunday 8.30am–3pm). Though it only dates from around 1500 the building has several Norman characteristics. The double windows with their elegant columns are typical of Siculo-Norman architecture. The museum documents life on Gozo during past centuries, and the exhibits include household implements, agricultural equipment, local costume and craft items.

To Xaghra and Marsalforn (16km/9 miles)

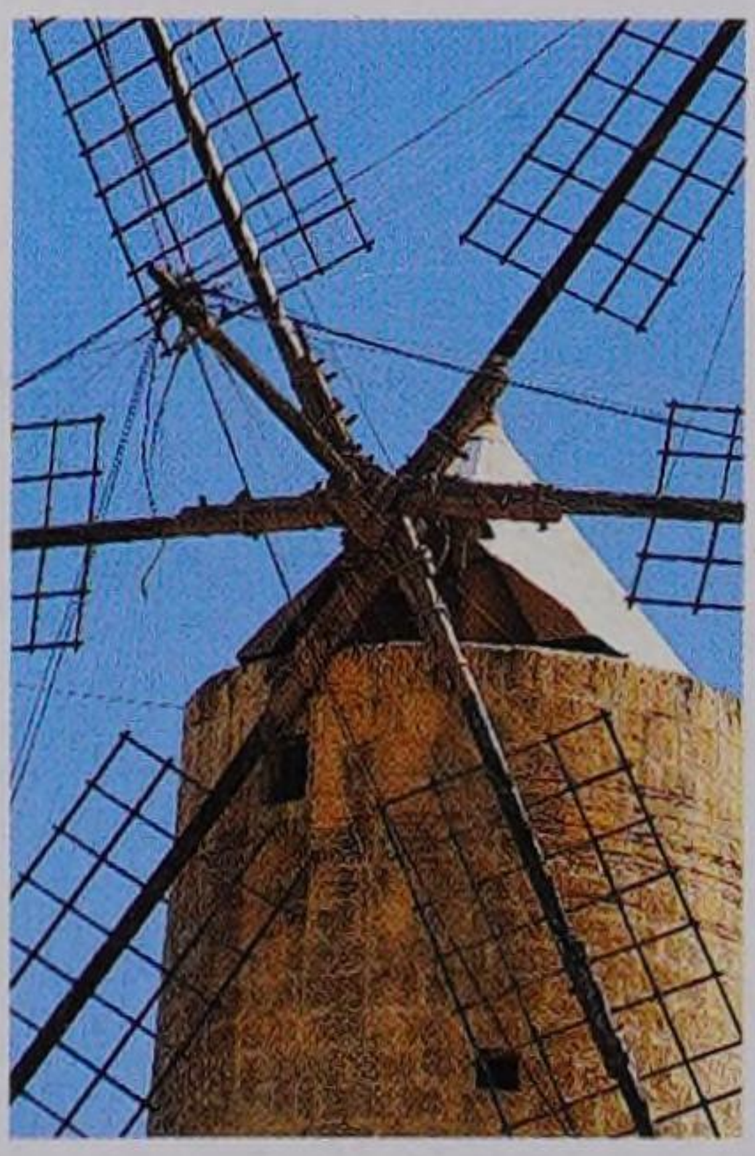
A pretty road lined with oleander trees leads from Victoria to the small rise dominated by the parish church of Xaghra. At the church square, a sign points the way down a side-street to **Xerri's Grotto** (Monday to Saturday 9–11.30am and 2.30–4pm), a limestone cavern that was discovered in 1923 beneath a house. Some of the formations resemble human figures. It may be of interest to learn that it takes around 500 years for stalagmites or stalactites to grow by just one centimetre.



Ggantija

Excavations have been going on since 1827 at the magnificent temple complex of ★★★ **Ggantija** on the edge of the Xaghra Ridge (1 October until 15 March 8.30am–4.30pm; 1 April until 30 September 8.30am–6.30pm, Sunday always 8.30am–3pm; closed on public holidays). It was built in around 4000BC, and some of the stone blocks used in its construction are 6m (19ft) high and weigh up to 20 tons.

There are two temple complexes, one with five chambers and the other with four; the entrances are marked by orthostats (standing stones) and face east. Sacrifices to the earth mother, or *Magna Mater*, took place in these temples, which were formerly roofed over. Some of the slabs have pitted decoration, the meaning of which is still unclear; other ornamentation has been completely removed by erosion.



Ta'Kola Windmill

One good detour at this point is the **Ta'Kola Windmill Museum** (1 October until 31 March 8.30am–4.30pm; 1 April until 30 September 8.30am–6.30pm), which is signposted from Ggantija. Windmills and windwheels are a common sight on the Maltese Islands; they are used to provide groundwater to irrigate the fields. They were first introduced by the Knights of St John, and were previously unknown on either Malta or Gozo. It was Grand Master Nicolas Cotoner (1663–80) who promoted corn as a crop

and financed a whole series of windmills. One magnificent example, built in 1725, can still be admired near Xaghra; today it is a museum. The workshops of the blacksmith, carpenter and miller were situated on the ground floor; all the tools and implements on display are authentic. The miller lived on the first floor with his wife, and the actual grinding machinery was on the very top floor; one wonders how they managed to get any sleep.

The road to Marsalforn passes to the left of the parish church in Xaghra. Halfway along it, follow the sign to **Calypso's Grotto**; the road arrives at a rocky outcrop above a beach without any buildings. This is Ramla Bay. A few steps lead to a cave in the rocks, by tradition the Homeric spot where the nymph Calypso bewitched Odysseus on his way home from the Trojan War.

The Marsalforn road now descends gradually from the Xaghras Ridge towards the coast; the undulating landscape here is one of Gozo's most typical and attractive features.

The erstwhile fishing village of **Marsalforn** has now grown into an important tourist resort, with a number of good bars and restaurants. In addition, the Calypso Hotel has the best diving centre in the islands.

Further along the coast road past Marsalforn there are several salt pans still in use. A direct route through the Marsalforn Valley leads back to Victoria (4km/2½ miles).

To the Inland Sea and Fungus Rock (6km/4 miles)

Travel westwards from Victoria and along the arches of the aqueduct built by the British. A turn-off leads to the basilica of **Ta'Pinu**, the most important pilgrimage church in the Maltese Islands. It stands on the site of an old chapel

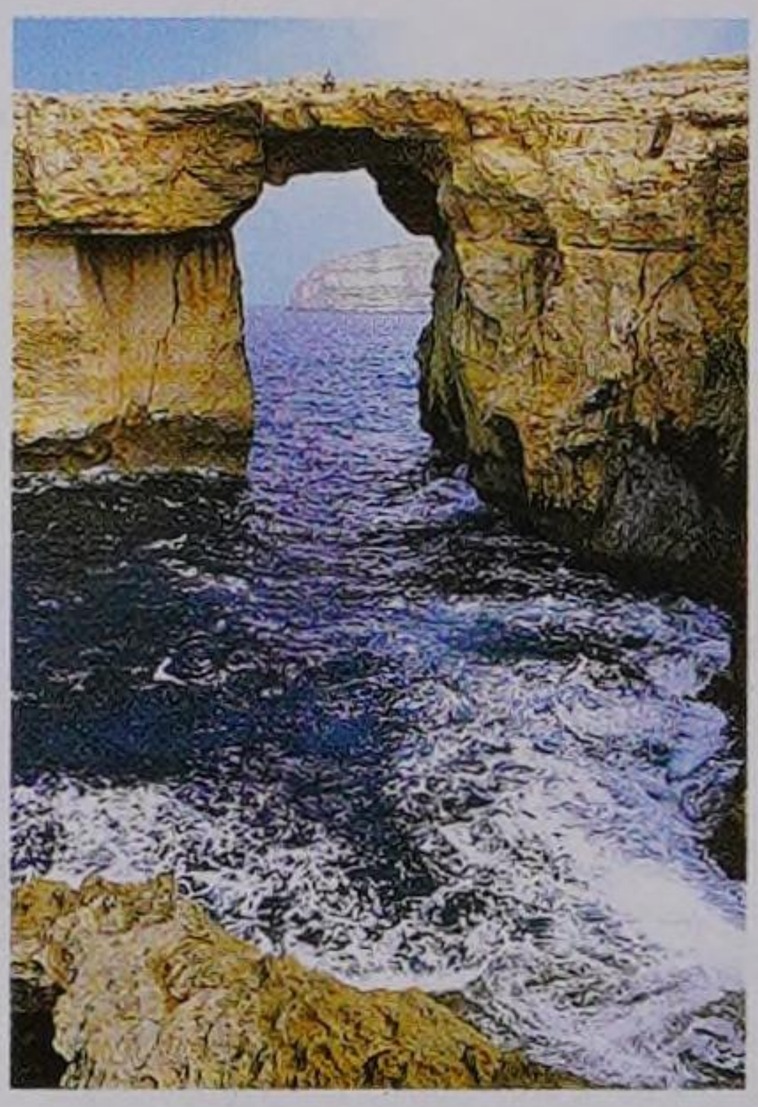
Ta'Pinu

Fisherman at Marsalforn

Church of the Visitation

Laceworkers at Ta'Dbiegi

The Azure window



where Carmela Grima, a farmer's wife, claimed she heard the voice of the Virgin Mary in 1883. Construction work began on the basilica and its free-standing campanile in 1920 and was completed in 1932.

At the next junction, keep to the right and soon the pretty village of **Gharb** will come into view, with one of the most magnificent baroque church facades on the entire archipelago. The ★ **Church of the Visitation** was built between 1679 and 1729, and its yellow butterfly facade is most original. The medieval market cross in Gharb is also a fine piece of stonemasonry and well worth a photograph, while the ★ **Gharb Folklore Museum**, taking up 26 rooms of an old Gozitan house right on the square, has fascinating displays relating to traditional crafts and lifestyles.

Back at the junction, keep right; just before the village of San Lawrenz, the **Ta'Dbiegi Crafts Village** (Monday to Saturday 10am–5pm) comes into view. Everything Gozo produces in the way of handmade goods can be purchased here, and the artisans can also be watched at work.

After the San Lawrenz Ridge the road gradually descends towards Dwejra on the west coast, and ends at the **Inland Sea**, a saltwater lagoon linked by a natural tunnel to the ocean. Water and wind erosion over the millennia have formed an enormous rock gate here called the **Azure Window**. Today this region, with all its cliffs and caverns, is very popular with divers.

On the other side of the bay beneath the former watchtower is the big outcrop known as **Fungus Rock**. It is named after a special plant that grew there which was used by the Knights of St John as a dressing for wounds and a remedy for dysentery. The plant was gathered by means of a primitive aerial ropeway, and the approach to it was guarded by a tower; thieves faced the death penalty if caught. Sadly, the plant has since been proved to have no medicinal properties at all – it isn't even a fungus.

To Xlendi Bay (4km/2½ miles)

Leave Victoria in a southerly direction. At the halfway mark is the suburb of **Fontana**, where water from springs inside the rock has been diverted into basins on either side of the road which were used as washing-places in former times. Shops containing local crafts and jewellery attract many visitors here.

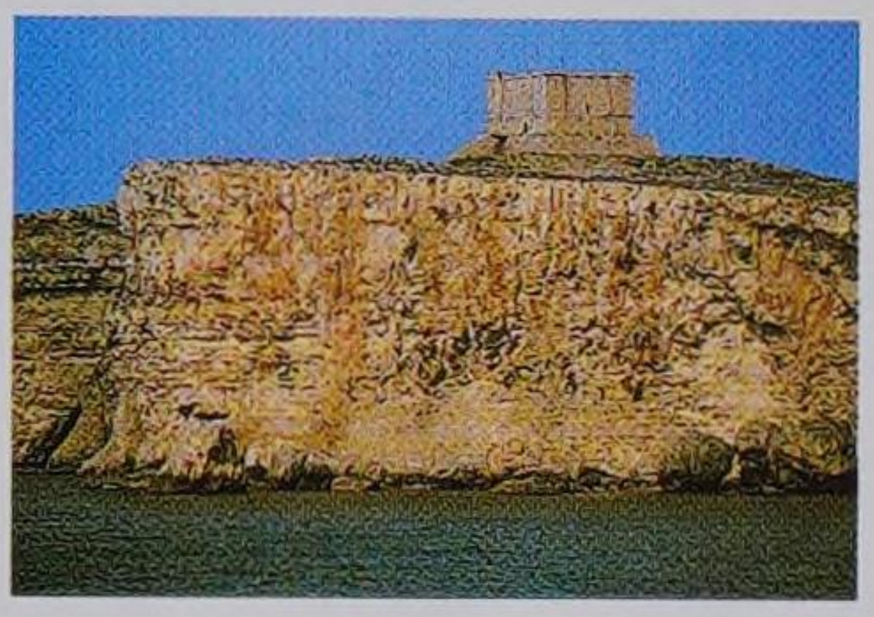
★ **Xlendi Bay** is the smallest bay on Gozo, and in many ways resembles a tiny fjord. Tourism has left its mark here, too in the form of newly-constructed banks of holiday apartments. The village itself, with its small but atmospheric beach promenade, regains its idyllic attraction towards evening time, when the hordes of day trippers have all gone home. Xlendi Bay is also another ideal location for divers.

Route 8

Comino

This tiny island, with its surface area of just 2.6sq km (1sq mile), was famed as long ago as antiquity for its wild thyme, which made the local honey so aromatic. The name Comino comes from the herb cumin, which grew in abundance here during the Middle Ages. The herb was an important export article until cotton cultivation was introduced after the American War of Independence (1775–83). There were also lots of rabbits on the island in the old days: under the Knights of St John, Comino was a hunting preserve, and the oldest-known map of the island, dating from 1579, has three rabbits marked on it. Comino was also important strategically, of course – pirate ships liked to hide here. To secure the straits the Knights had a **watch-tower** built in 1618, and it can still be seen today. The arcaded building beneath it was built as a quarantine station by the British, and was mainly used during World War I.

Comino and its watch-tower



The secret bays along the coast here which the pirates so enjoyed are sources of delight today for amateur mariners, and can often get quite crowded. The finest of them is the **Blue Lagoon**: its flat golden sandy beach is delightful. The sports available include swimming, diving, surfing, sailing and water-skiing; harpooning fish is strictly forbidden, however. Day trippers are welcome in restaurant of the hotel, and there's a large selection of good food. Bear in mind that the Maltese and Gozitans also recognise the beauty of this place.

The Blue Lagoon

Archaeology, Art and Architecture

Opposite: the temples of Tarxien

Neolithic Period and Antiquity

The Neolithic temples on Malta and Gozo were built during the 4th millennium BC and are the oldest surviving monuments of their kind. The fascinating exhibits on display in the archaeological museums at Valletta and Victoria document the high level of culture during this epoch.

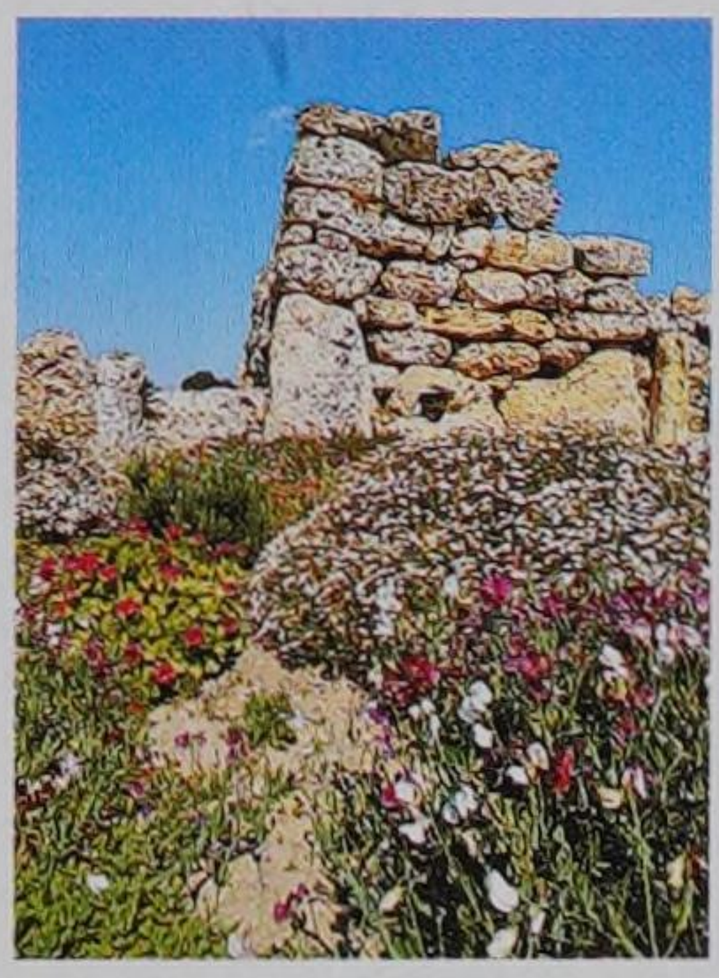
The word 'megalithic' (from the Greek *megas* = large, and *lithos* = stone) applies to the stone monuments of Western Europe, particularly those of the culture which flourished in Brittany in around 4000BC, with its dolmens, menhirs and cromlechs. Malta, too, was an important centre of this culture. The weird temples and burial chambers found here seem likely to have been based around an elaborate cult of the dead. Death and rebirth were seen as integral parts of the same earthly cycle as embodied in the earth-mother, or *Magna Mater*, who gave life and also removed it. Death and eternal fertility were closely connected in the psyche of early agricultural communities. Rituals above and below ground could have been associated with these two spheres of belief.

The role of Malta within the Western European megalithic culture is quite unique. The underground burial chamber known as the Hypogeum *(see page 55)* is the only surviving subterranean cult site of its kind in the world, and so far over 30 temple complexes, in use from around 4100–2500BC, have been discovered on these tiny islands. The temples had a trefoil plan and roofs of corbelled stone; the southern temple of Mnjadra on Malta is thought to have functioned as a calendar of the seasons *(see page 59)*.

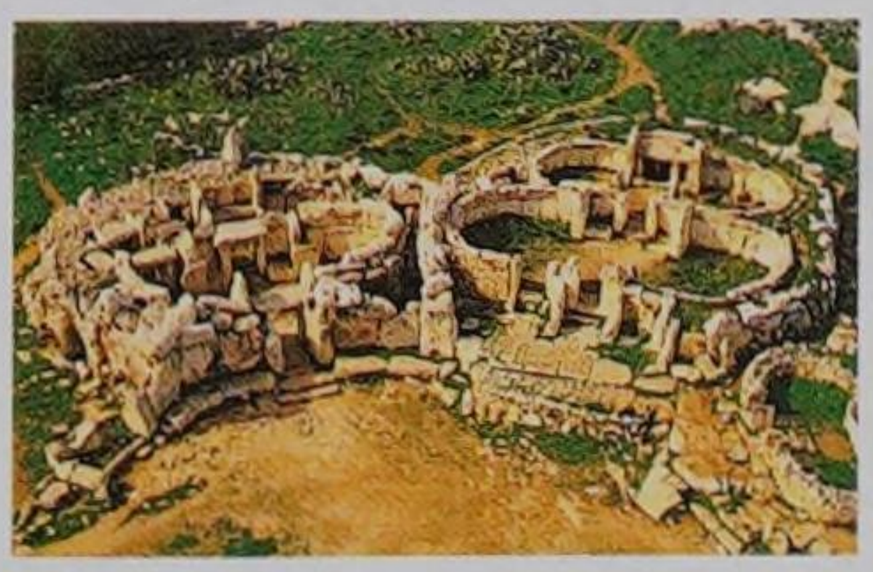
The Neolithic period on Malta is divided up into several different phases:

Early Neolithic (5200–4100BC): Ghar Dalam.
Middle Neolithic I (4100–3600BC): Ceramics, stone axes.
Middle Neolithic II (3600–3000BC): Mnajdra, Ggantija.
Late Neolithic (3000–2500BC): Tarxien, Hagar Qim and the Hypogeum.

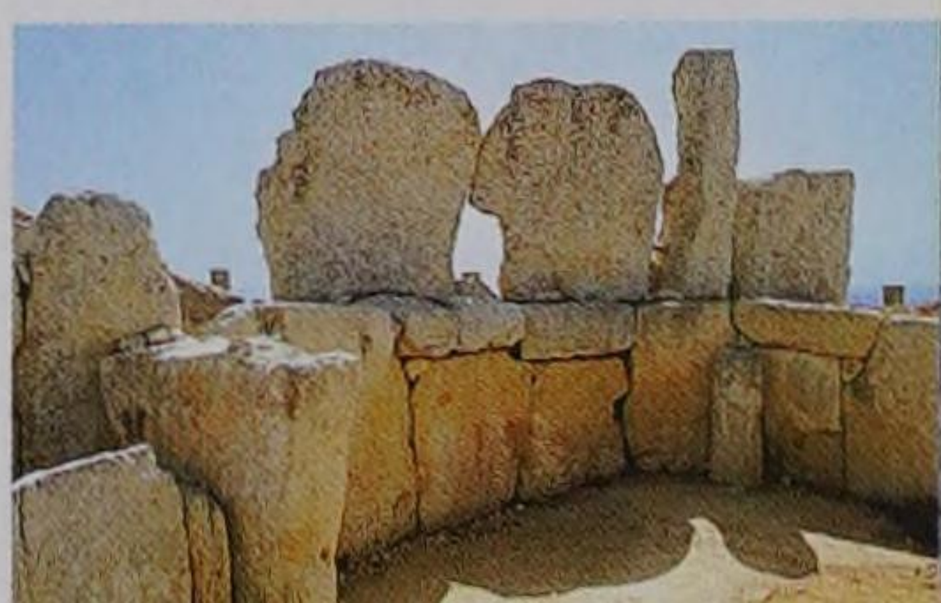
No-one believes the ancient Maltese folk tales about giants building the island's temples any more – but how *did* the megalithic people transport and dress those enormous and unbelievably heavy blocks of stone? The temples are far from any quarry. The blocks seem to have been transported on wooden sleds – or over numerous round pieces of rock which can still be seen today in the vicinity of the temples. To place the stones upright, a hole was dug in the ground to receive them, and then two earth ramps were built up around it – on one of the ramps the slab was rolled over stones, pulled up by the people on the

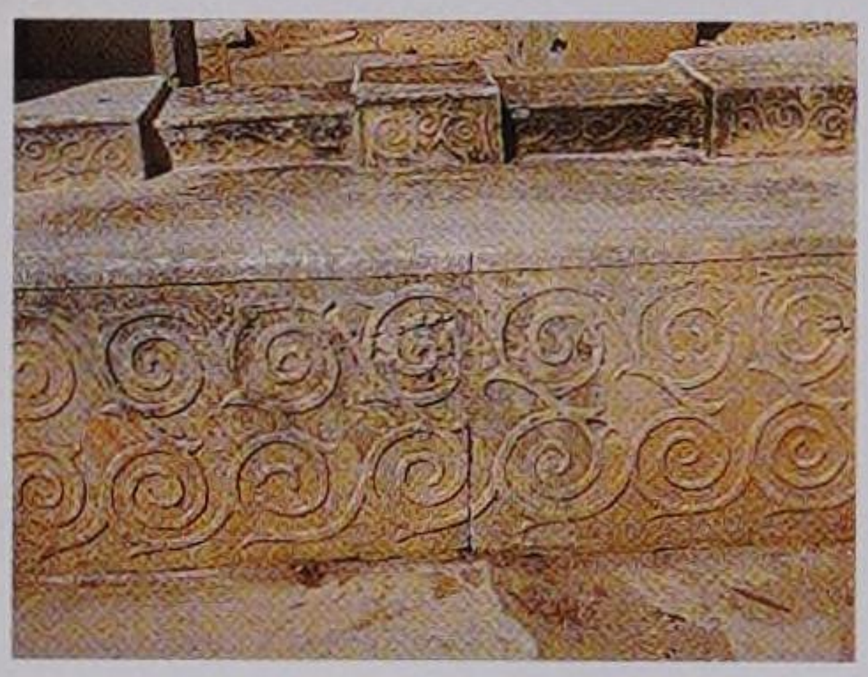


Ggantija

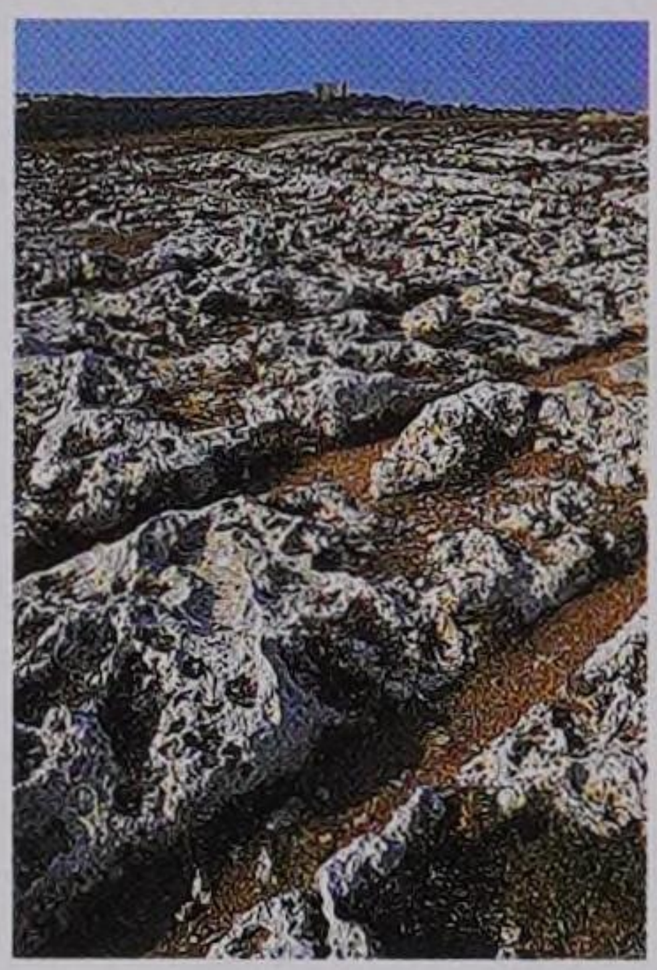


Mnajdra
Hagar Qim





Reliefs created using finer tools



Clapham Junction

other ramp and then tipped over. The same principle was used for cross-members above two vertical stones: earth ramps were built up to the left and right; the slab was pulled up along rollers and then positioned on top.

The type of stone common in Malta and Gozo has the advantage that it can be dressed relatively easily using harder varieties of rock. Obsidian, a shiny black volcanic rock imported from Lipari and Pantelleria, was ideal for this purpose. Surfaces could be smoothed easily with chisels, and reliefs could also be created using finer tools.

The megalithic culture came to an abrupt end in around 2500BC, and no-one knows why. Either another people invaded the islands, thus extinguishing the temple culture, or it was wiped out by disease and natural catastrophe.

The next settlers arrived during the Bronze Age (from around 2000BC onwards) and left behind several mysterious cart-ruts, marking the location of what seem to have been transport routes; there are even passing-places (eg 'Clapham Junction' near the Dingli Cliffs, *see page 48*). The most convincing theory is that the ruts in the soft limestone were created by carts or sleds on runners.

It was at the beginning of the 1st century BC that the strategic significance of Malta was first recognised by a seafaring people: the Phoenicians made use of the safe harbours, but the only remaining traces of their presence are several funerary gifts – and also the *Cippus*, a tombstone in two languages (Greek and Phoenician), which made it possible to decipher their script (in Valletta's National Museum, *see page 22*). The Phoenician colony of Carthage then took over the archipelago in around 650BC and left a temple to Astarte near Marsaxlokk.

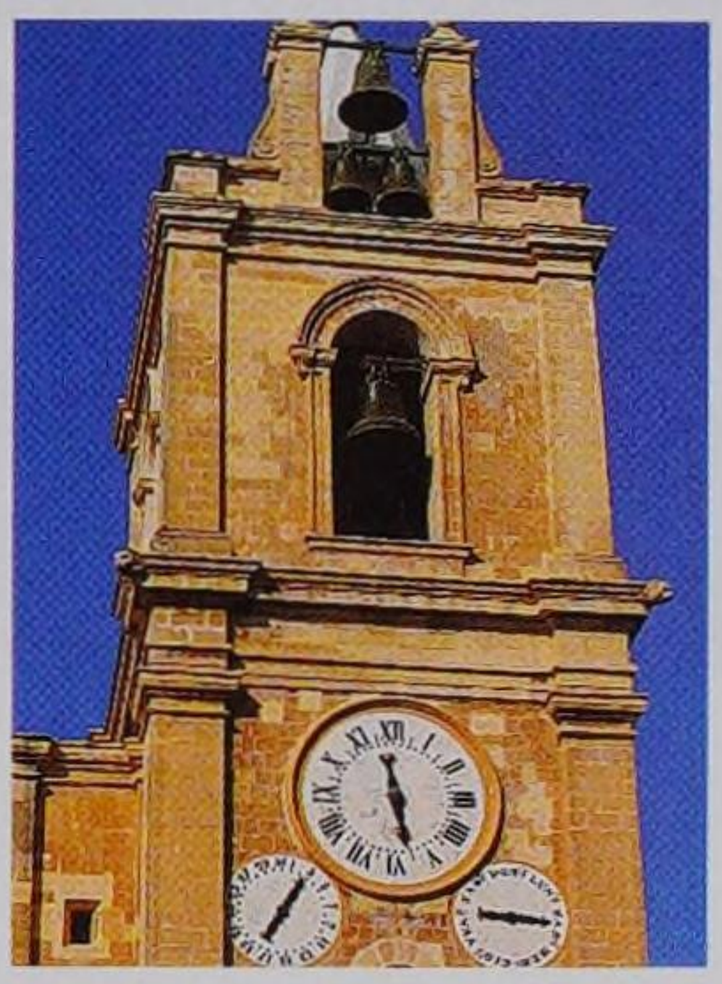
The islands' next rulers were the Romans, who arrived in 218BC. The villa at Rabat *(see page 45)* illustrates the prosperity of that period, as do the Roman baths near Ghajn Tuffieha *(see page 61)*. It was during Roman rule that the Early Christian catacombs were built with their altar slabs and frescoes (eg the labyrinthine galleries and passageways beneath Rabat, *see page 45*). Under Arab rule (AD870–AD1090) the large Roman city was divided up, and Mdina was converted into a fortress *(see page 40)*. The local population adopted the Arabic vernacular of their new rulers – forming the basis of today's Maltese – and also Islam. The Norman conquest in 1090 connected Malta's fate with that of Sicily until 1530, when the archipelago was ceded to the Knights of St John (Knights Hospitallers). Malta's gradual return to Christianity was accompanied by the construction of a series of small churches, many of them very interesting architecturally. The Early Renaissance in Europe passed Malta by, however; architecture continued in Siculo-Norman style.

The Hospitallers (1530–1798)

The buildings that date from the early period of Hospitaller rule all had to be constructed quickly, and the style is essentially simple; decoration was not eliminated, but use of it was sparing. Valletta was built from 1566 onwards, and the buildings designed by Gerolamo Cassar (1520–86) that still survive are distinctive for this reduced decoration. In the 17th century the Ottoman menace seemed to have finally been banned for good, and architecture became correspondingly more elaborate. A series of magnificent parish churches began with the construction of St Mary's in Attard (1610, *see page 54*), a fine Renaissance work by the architect Tommaso Dingli (1591–1666); Lorenzo Gafà (1630–1704) established the imposing double-tower facade that was to become such a typical feature of Maltese churches from then on. The high point of the Maltese Baroque style was Zabbar's parish church *(see page 51)*, with its facade designed by Bonavia in 1737; around the same time, the plans were drawn up for the church of St Helen in Birkirkara *(see page 53)* by the architect Domenico Cachia (c1700–90), duly winning him the commission to build the playful Auberge de Castile in Valletta *(see page 19)*. During the 18th century the island was covered with much sugary baroque splendour, which reached its peak in the parish church at Gharb (Gozo) with its butterfly facade *(see page 70)*.

Painting also flourished alongside architecture: the brief period spent on Malta by the great Italian artist Michelangelo Caravaggio (1573–1610) exerted a powerful influence on local painting; his *Beheading of St John the Baptist (see page 25)* with its strong contrasts of light and shade provided much of the inspiration for the work of Mattia Preti (1613–99), who painted the interior of the Co-Cathedral in Valletta *(see page 23)*.

St John's Co-Cathdral designed by Cassar



Auberge de Castille

British Rule (1800 onwards) to the Present

The British left behind a secular architecture that characterises the islands. They used the local honey-coloured stone as a construction material and particularly favoured neoclassical decor. This gave their purpose-built structures an attractive appearance (Tigné Barracks, the Bighi Complex) and also resulted in several creative solutions in private houses (Villino Priuli in Balluta Bay; Villa Rosa in St George's Bay).

Today's architects seem to have lost all respect for the island style: the view is blocked all too often by ugly concrete structures that usually mar the skyline (eg in front of the Spinola Palace, *see page 37*). There have been a number of successes, however; one such is the attractive rustic-style L-Imgarr Hotel, above the harbour in Mgarr on Gozo.

A Caravaggio in St John's

Plenty of gay abandon

Theatre, Music and Festivals

Theatre

The season in Valletta's Manoel Theatre and the Astra Theatre in Victoria (Gozo) lasts from October to May. Opera, operetta, musicals, ballet and plays are all on the agenda.

The Astra Theatre

Concerts

These take place in the theatres and other halls between October and May. One high-quality fixture is the *Monday Ovations* series (chamber music, lieder, ballet), held from January to June and October to December in the Phoenicia Hotel. The Malta Jazz Festival in the last week of July also has several famous-name performers.

International Arts Festival

This is one whole month of cultural happenings in the open air: orchestral concerts, chamber music, jazz, theatre, cinema and art exhibitions (**mid-July to mid-August**).

Festivals and Folklore

The deep religious faith of the Maltese is reflected in the large number of church festivals, many of which are held during the summer months. Alongside the official public holidays, a total of 150 towns and villages on the island hold *festas* to celebrate their individual patron saints. This means that a *festa* is taking place somewhere or other nearly every weekend. The streets are filled with colourful decoration, flags are hoisted, statues of saints line the streets and there is almost always a firework display.

The **Maltese Carnival** – certainly the most colourful of all the island's festivals – is held in **February/March** before the beginning of Lent. It begins with the *Parata*,

a traditional children's sword dance commemorating the Great Siege of 1565. Dancing competitions featuring historical costume are held in the Palace Square in Valletta, and the hotels organise masked balls.

On **Good Friday** life-sized statues are carried through the streets, and sometimes there are performances of scenes from the Passion. On **Easter Sunday** Christ's resurrection is celebrated with a large number of processions in many of the island's towns and villages; the ones in Cospicua and Vittoriosa are particularly impressive.

When (nearly) all the Maltese meet up in the Buskett gardens on **28 and 29 June** for the **Mnarja Festival**, hundreds of coloured lanterns and lamps hang from the orange and lemon trees, illuminating the stands where small sweet and savoury snacks are prepared or *fenkata moqil* ('dry' rabbit) is grilled. No-one really knows how old the festival is. The Feast of SS Peter and Paul was celebrated long before the arrival of the Knights of St John in 1530; for the rural population it was a kind of harvest festival. The idea of festooning the cathedral in Mdina and the city walls with lanterns probably came from Sicily originally; the name *Mnarja* comes from the Italian *il-Luminaria*. During the mid-19th century the custom spread as more and more villages held *festas* in honour of their patron saints. Folk dancing and also bareback horse-races are two major highlights of the Mnarja Festival.

Fireworks galore

Here is a list of some other popular festivals:

10 February: Feast of St Paul's Shipwreck (public holiday), commemorating the historic event of AD60.

31 March: Freedom Day (public holiday). Regatta held in Grand Harbour.

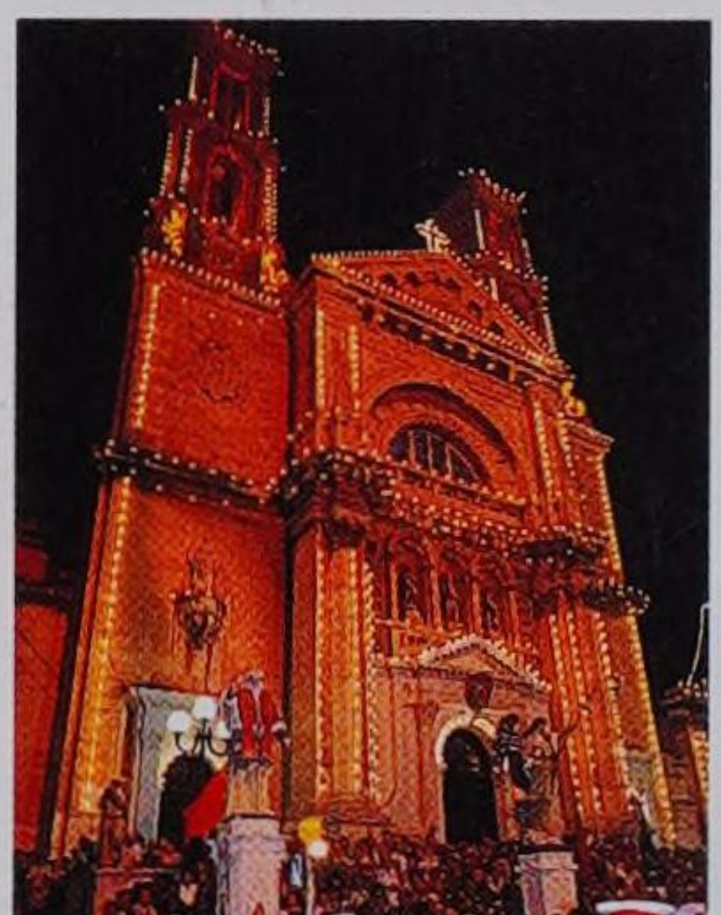
June to September: *Festa* season. Each town and village has its own patron saint and celebrates on the weekend following the respective name-day. The streets are decorated with flags, statues, garlands and lanterns; bands play music, and delicious food is sold from stalls. Firework displays on Sunday provide a magnificent finale for most *festas*. Some of the more lavish are: Lija 6 August; Mosta 15 August; Naxxar 8 September; Victoria (Gozo) 15 August; Mellieha 8 September.

End of June: The Mdina Flower & Folklore Festival. The normally quiet town of Mdina gets extremely loud during this festival of flowers and song.

25 June: Il-Bandu. Colourful procession through Mdina and Rabat proclaiming the Mnarja Festival.

8 September: Our Lady of Victories (public holiday). Regatta in Grand Harbour, Valletta.

21 September: Independence Day (public holiday). Celebrations of the islands' independence in 1964, with many local events.



Festa in full swing in Hamrun

NEPTUNES RES

Food and Drink

Maltese cuisine is Mediterranean, based on fresh vegetables, fish and meat. The clear Italian influence is not only manifest in the ubiquitous pasta dishes, but also in the abundant use of tomatoes, capers and olives. With the early tourism years dominated by British visitors, restaurant fare tended to be of the 'steak, chips and salad' variety. Times have changed, though the love for chips has remained.

Most restaurants serve fresh fish (swordfish – *pixxis-pad* – is very popular) and the traditional fish soup *(aljotta)*, as well as fried or stewed rabbit (*fenkata*) and lamb (*haruf*), together with a large selection of pasta and pizza based dishes. In addition, there are a large number of Chinese and Indian restaurants, and, if you search around, Turkish, Greek, Indonesian and even Russian.

Some Maltese specialities:

Bigilla – White beans mashed into a smooth paste along with butter, salt, pepper, garlic and parsley. Tastes delicious spread on bread.

Bragoli – a slice of beef rolled around a filling of egg, bacon, breadcrumbs, parsley, and garlic, fried, and then simmered in onions and wine.

Bzar Ahdar Mimli – Green peppers stuffed with a mixture of various herbs such as chopped parsley and mint, and capers, olives, breadcrumbs and egg.

Cartoccio – A whole fish steamed in foil with garlic, onion, tomatoes, capers, lemon and a dash of white wine.

Fenkata – A whole menu based on rabbit. Spaghetti with rabbit sauce to start with, and then rabbit in red wine sauce with seasonal vegetables.

Kapunata – Tomatoes, green peppers, aubergines and garlic all fried up together. Usually served as an hors d'oeuvre or side-dish.

Kawlata – Vegetable soup containing smoked Maltese sausage.

Lampuki – Malta's favourite fish, the 'dolphin-fish', unfortunately only available in September and October, baked in puff pastry together with onions, garlic, tomatoes and capers.

Qarnita – Octopus stew, with olives, onions, nuts, raisins and peas in a delicious white wine-based sauce.

Ross fil-Forn – A rice dish with mince, eggs, tomatoes and saffron.

Timpana – Macaroni soufflé with a filling of beef, liver, ham, eggs, parmesan cheese and tomato.

Gbejna – Maltese cheese made from sheep or goat's milk, small and round, and sprinkled with black pepper. Make sure you eat properly pasteurised *gbejnet*; the unpasteurised variety may cause Mediterranean fever.

Opposite: fish straight from the sea

Mullet makes a good meal

Seasonal vegetables

Open-air café in Valletta

Try some true Maltese food

Some smaller outlets specialise in snacks, which can be eaten throughout the day. Here are some to look out for:

Mqaret – Similar to ravioli but filled with dates.

Pastizzi – Puff pastry parcels filled with peas or ricotta cheese.

Siniza – Sweet cake made with curd cheese.

Kannoli – Crunchy cylindrical biscuits resembling large cigars, filled with ricotta cheese and candied fruit.

Figolla – Marzipan biscuits in entertaining shapes (fish, pigeon, lamb, etc), only available at Easter.

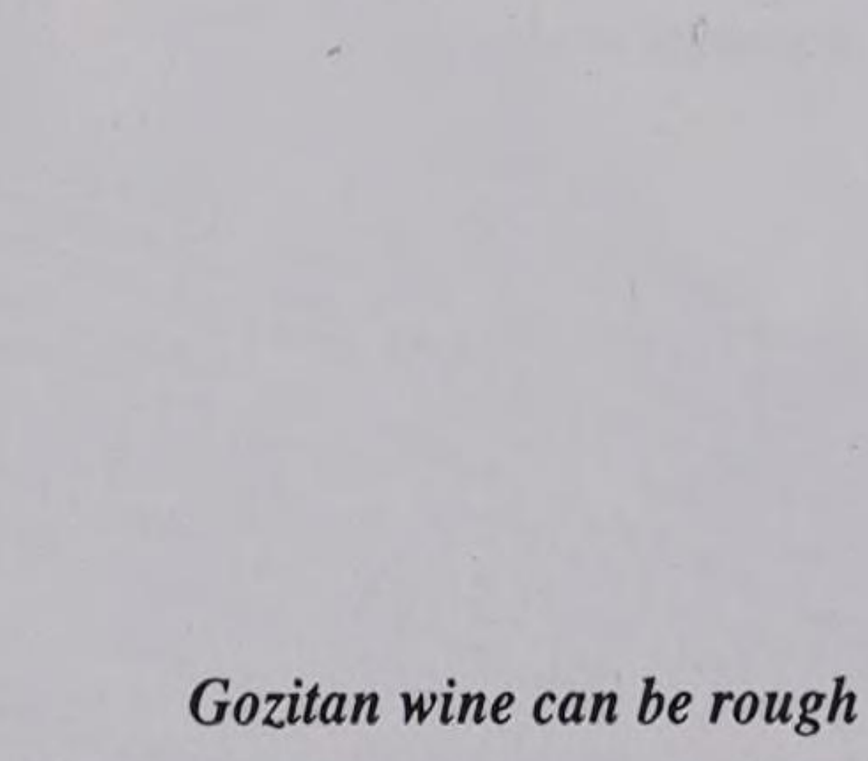
Hobs biz-zejt – Literally this means 'bread with oil', and forms a delicious basis for many variations with tomatoes, capers, olives, lettuce, tuna-fish or sardines.

Drinks

The fresh fruit juices are utterly delicious. As far as soft drinks are concerned, one local brand called *Kinnie* is rather unusual – a cross between Coca-Cola and root beer.

The wines of Malta and Gozo are very drinkable, and usually a lot cheaper than the ones on restaurant menus. Often strong, they tend to develop their own character. *Palazzo Verdala* (reds, whites and rosés), *Green Label* (dry white), *La Valette* (red) and *Marsovin's Chardonnay*, *Cabernet Sauvignon* and *Pinot Grigiot* are all worth trying. Gozitan wine (*Citadella*) tends to be rougher, and not to everyone's taste.

Gozitan wine can be rough



The local brews, Farson's Strong Ale, Blue Label Ale, Cisk Lager and Farson's Shandy, are excellent and match the continental imported lagers and beers in both taste and quality. Farson's Lacto Milk-Stout 'with Vitamin B for extra strength' has more of an aquired taste.

Restaurant selection

Here are some restaurant suggestions for Malta and Gozo, comprising three categories: $$$ (expensive); $$ (moderate; $ (cheap).

Malta

$$$Giannini, 23 Windmill Street, Valletta, tel: 237121. Great view of Manoel Island; Italian-Maltese cuisine.

$$De Robertis, Castille Square, Valletta, tel: 237121. Rooftop restaurant with magnificent Grand Harbour views.

$$$Il Re del Pesce, Triq id-Dahla ta'San Tumas, tel: 684178. Fine location above Marsascala and St Thomas Bay; delicious seafood.

$$Ir-Rizzu, Fishermen's Wharf, Marsaxlokk, tel: 651569. Overlooking the quaint fishing village and specialising in daily fresh fish.

$$Medina, 7 Holy Cross Street, Mdina, tel: 454004. Magnificent old building in medieval town; Maltese and international cuisine.

$Bacchus, Inguanez Street, Mdina, tel: 454981. Nice old building with beautiful terrace for summer; international cuisine.

$$Venus, Pioneer Road, Bugibba, tel: 571604. Intimate environment for special occasions; varied international cuisine.

$$$Dolce Vita, 159 St George's Road, St Julian's, tel: 337806. Magnificent terrace view of St Julian's Bay; specialising in seafood.

$$San Giuliano, Spinola Bay, St Julian's, tel: 332000. Situated on the waterfront; Italian-Maltese cuisine.

$Big Foot, Borodino Street, St Paul's Bay, tel: 581141. Typical Maltese bar/restaurant specialising in rabbit and other Maltese dishes.

$$Gillieru, Church Street, St Paul's Bay, tel: 573480. Fine seafood served in waterfront locality.

$Charlie's Inn, Kennedy Drive, Salina Bay, tel: 573455. Maltese tavern specialising in local cuisine.

Gozo

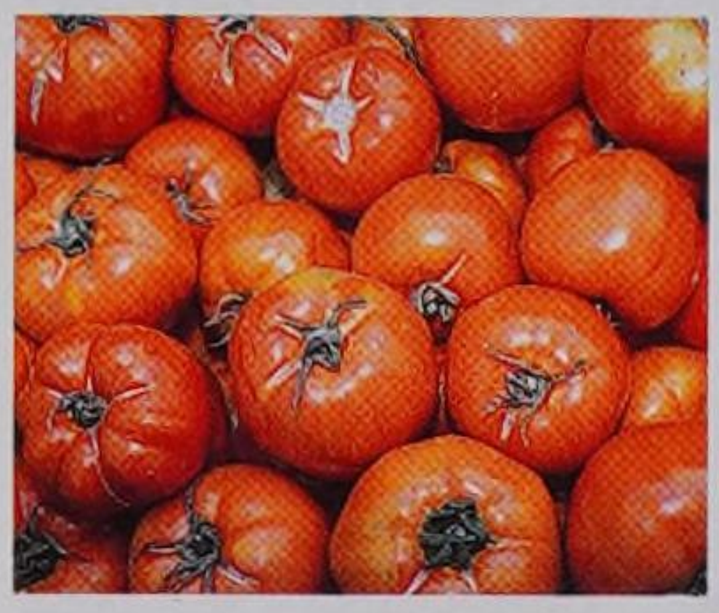
$$$Salvina, 21 Frenc ta' l-Gharb Street, Gharb, tel: 552505. Converted farmhouse in quaint and rustic village with fine international cuisine.

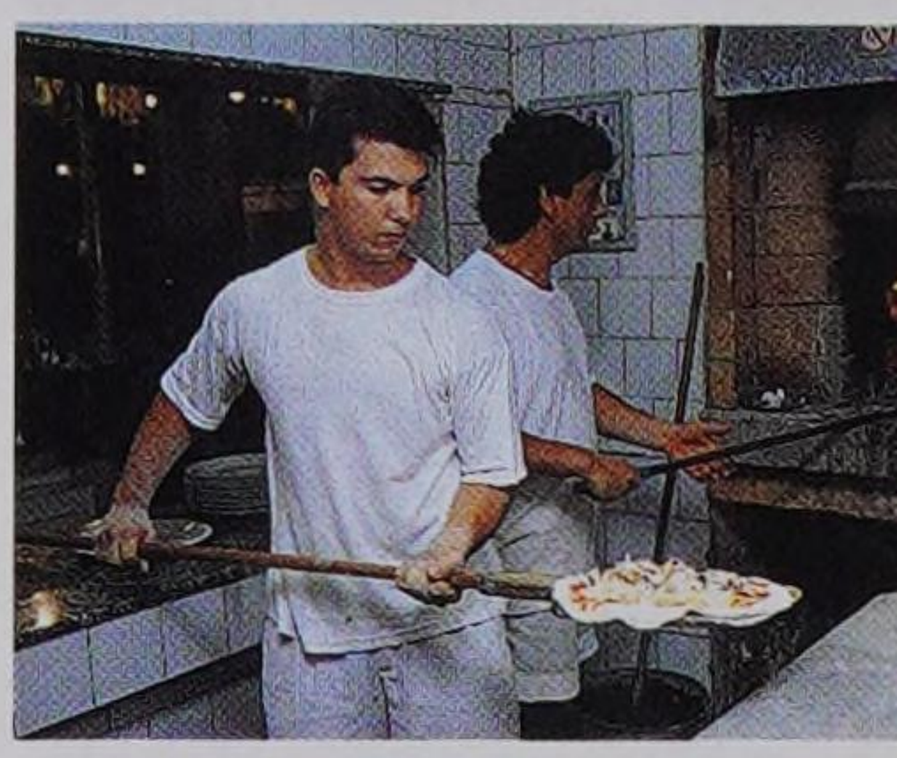
$$Smuggler's Cove, Marsalforn Bay, Marsalforn, tel: 556725. Hewn from the rock in a waterfront locality; international cuisine and speciality pizza/pasta dishes.

$$Victoria, 17 Xaghra Road, Marsalforn, tel: 554646. Adjacent to the church of this old fishing village; international cuisine.

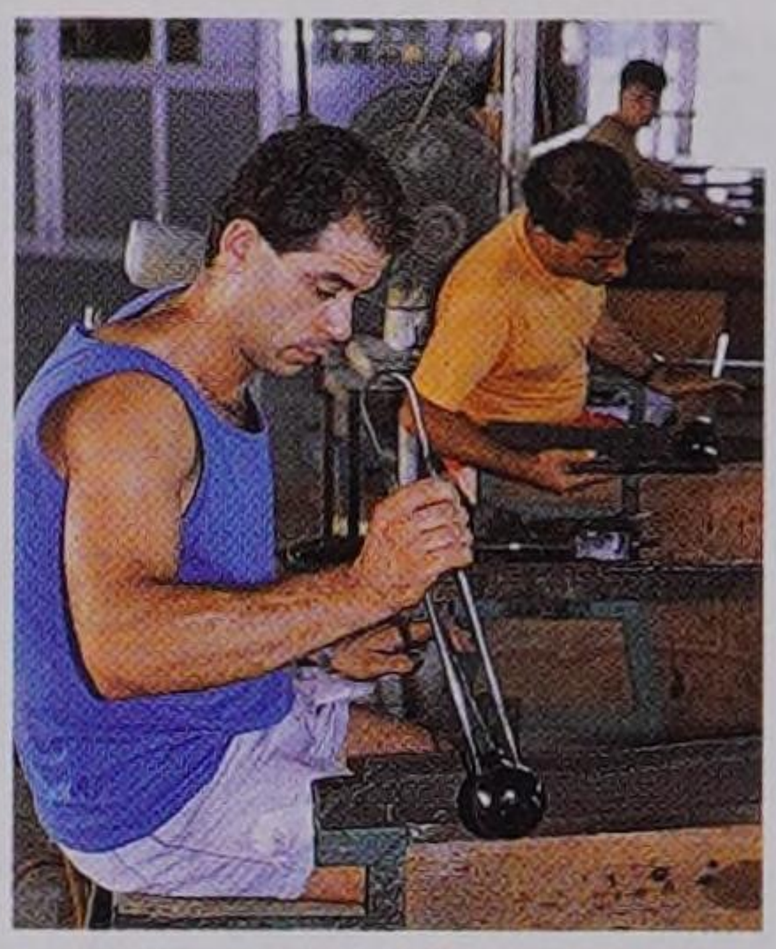
$Mermaid, Menqa, Marsalforn, tel: 553695. Facing the harbour quay and specialising in Maltese-style swordfish and rabbit.

Fresh produce





Pizza is always popular



Glass-blowing is a fine art

Fine jewellery in Valletta

Shopping

Today's visitors to Malta would have real problems finding souvenirs – apart from honey – if the Hospitallers had never arrived on the islands. The Knights needed workers for their fortifications, harbour installations, churches and palaces, and were also nobles from the European upper classes, with all the requirements that entailed. Under the Knights Hospitallers, trade flourished and the islands' population quintupled. The Maltese learnt how to work with gold and silver; they learnt weaving, pottery, glass-blowing and carpentry, and the women were introduced to lacemaking (*see page 84*). Hence the long tradition of Maltese arts and crafts.

Naturally suits of armour and swords are no longer produced these days, but gold- and silversmiths are still very much in business. Their shops in Valletta are in the small streets between Republic Street and St John's Co-Cathedral, and their work is of exceptional quality; the silver products in particular with their fine filigree work often resemble the islands' lace.

Maltese lace products include shawls, stoles, decorative covers and tablecloths, and are sold everywhere; on Gozo it's even possible to watch them being manufactured.

The Knights successfully introduced cotton cultivation to the islands, and the Maltese finally had a raw material they could process into a finished product. Weaving promptly began and has existed here ever since. Cotton (imported these days), wool and linen are used to make colourful covers, curtains, pullovers and jackets.

One very popular hobby on Malta is modelling: handmade miniature versions of historic buildings with carved balconies, windmills, watch-towers and domed churches. There are boats too, of course: the water-taxis known as *dghajsa*, and the colourful fishing vessels known as *luzzu*, that can be seen bobbing about in Malta's harbours. Modelling is also often done with clay, and the islands' potters produce several fine jars and vessels, some traditional, some designed by themselves.

The same applies to the glass-blowers, who drew their original inspiration from the Venetians (not the Phoenicians, as many will proudly claim). Dark red, green, yellow and blue pastels predominate in their vases, bottles and bowls.

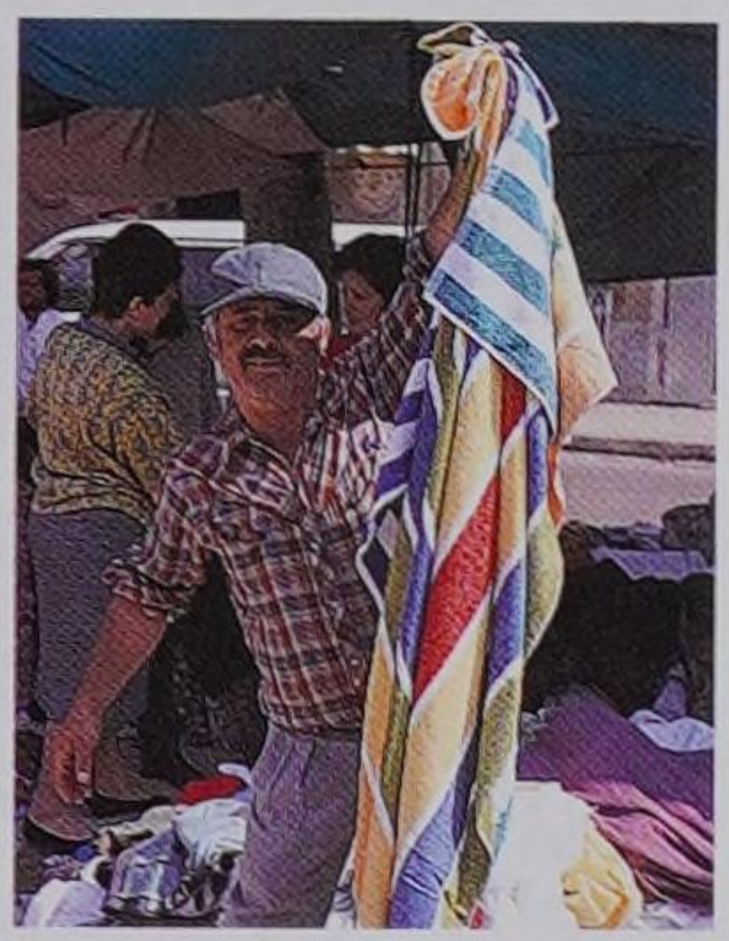
Crafts centres

Malta

The **Malta Government Crafts Centre**, situated in the colonnades opposite Valletta Cathedral (16 June until 30 Septembe, Monday to Friday 8am–1.30pm; 1 October until 15 June, Monday to Friday 9am–12.30pm and 2–5pm).

The centre has a large selection of crafts to admire, but no direct sales.

Ta'Qali Craft Village, at the centre of the triangle formed by Rabat, Mosta and Attard, is the largest crafts centre on the islands, with around 20 companies located in former World War II airport hangars. Pottery, silver filigree work, glass-blowing, replica Knights, weaving and knitting are among the crafts demonstrated here. Direct sales (Monday to Friday 8am–4pm).



Take your pick

Gozo

Ta'Dbiegi near San Lawrenz is the craft village on Gozo, where the accent is very much on weaving and lacemaking (Monday to Saturday 10am–5pm); route description *see page 70*.

Gozo Crafts Centre and Lace-making Workshop. Located in the Citadel in Victoria, this is primarily a museum and exhibition centre *(see page 67)*; souvenirs are sold in Prison Street.

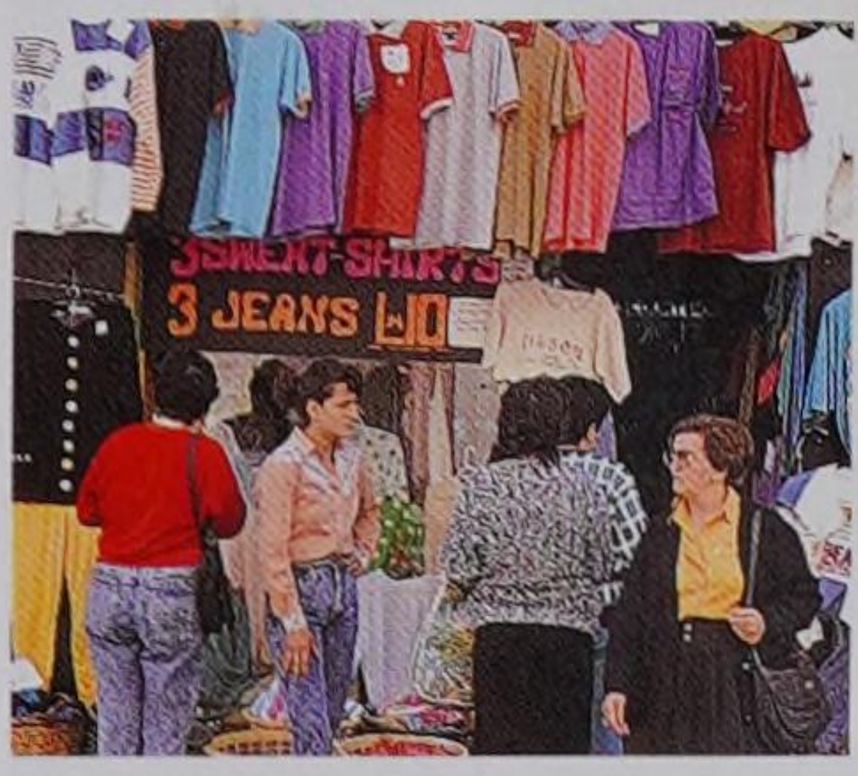
Gozo Glass-blowing Centre. At the 'V' where the Dwejra/St Lawrenz road divides.

Fontenella Crafts Centre. On the Xlendi road, opposite the Wash-house.

Street Markets

Markets are attractive for old and young alike, and Malta and Gozo have several good ones. In Valletta there's a street market held on weekday mornings in Merchants Street near the Cathedral, but the big one is the Flea Market each Sunday morning in front of the City Gate, with everything portable on display: books, plants, door-knockers, radios, kitchen sinks, records, lamps, etc.

There are also daily markets in Rabat and Marsaxlokk; the latter is famous for its picturesque backdrop of church,



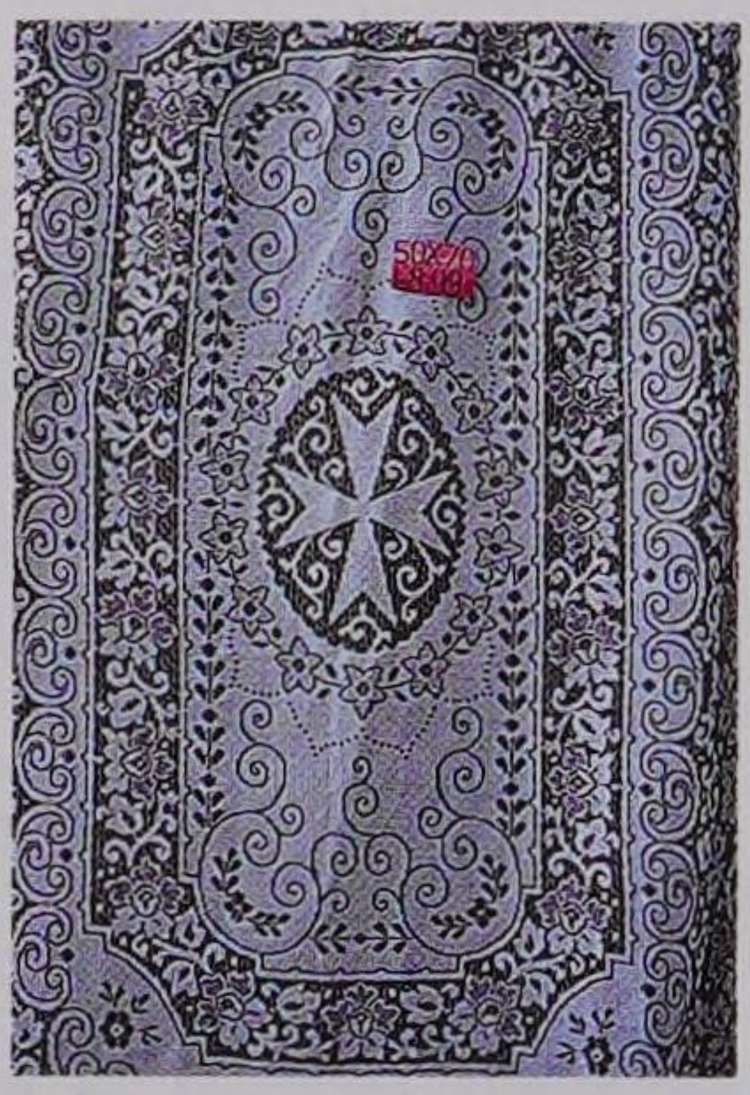
Market day in Valletta

bay and colourful boats. Marsaxlokk's market also sells food on Sundays, which is when the locals shop for freshlly-caught fish. In addition, there are weekly markets in Mosta on Mondays, Cospicua on Tuesdays and Birzebbuga on Thursdays.

The daily street market on Gozo is on It-Tokk Square in Victoria.

The market halls of Valletta are situated to the rear of the Grand Master's Palace. Every weekday morning there's a bewildering array of Maltese agricultural produce on display here: fruit, vegetables, dairy products, sausage, meat, poultry, stuffed olives, pickled capers, etc.

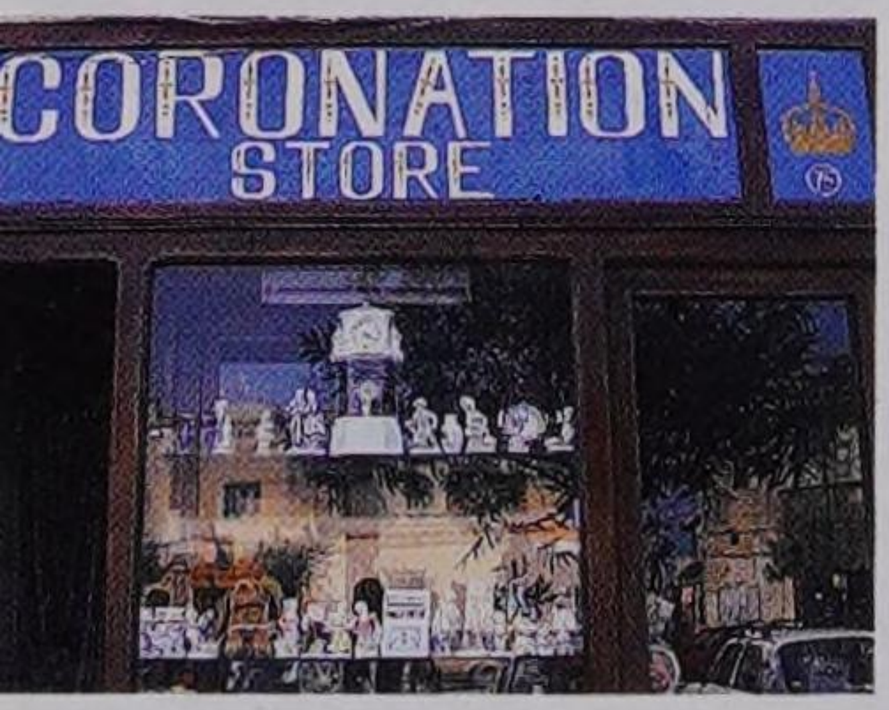
Traditional lace



Maltese Lace

Despite their urgent task of defending Christendom from Islamic pirates, the Knights of St John still found time to interest the women of Malta in the art of lacemaking. This luxury product originated in Genoa during the 16th century, and first appeared on Malta in around 1640. The Knights built up a real industry, and bobbin lacemaking (rather than needle lacemaking) has been passed down through the generations ever since. First of all, a bobbin lace pillow needs to be made: it is filled with straw and wrapped in various layers of cotton and newspaper before finally being enveloped in brown paper. The pattern is then pinned to the top end of it, and needles are pricked through into the pillow at the points of the pattern where the threads are attached. The threads have the bobbins dangling from them, and are thus held taut. Any kind of thread can be used: silk, fine linen or coarser materials. Special books show how classic patterns were gradually altered on Malta over the centuries.

One very attractive pattern is not classic by any means, nor has it changed at all over the years: the eight-pointed Maltese cross.



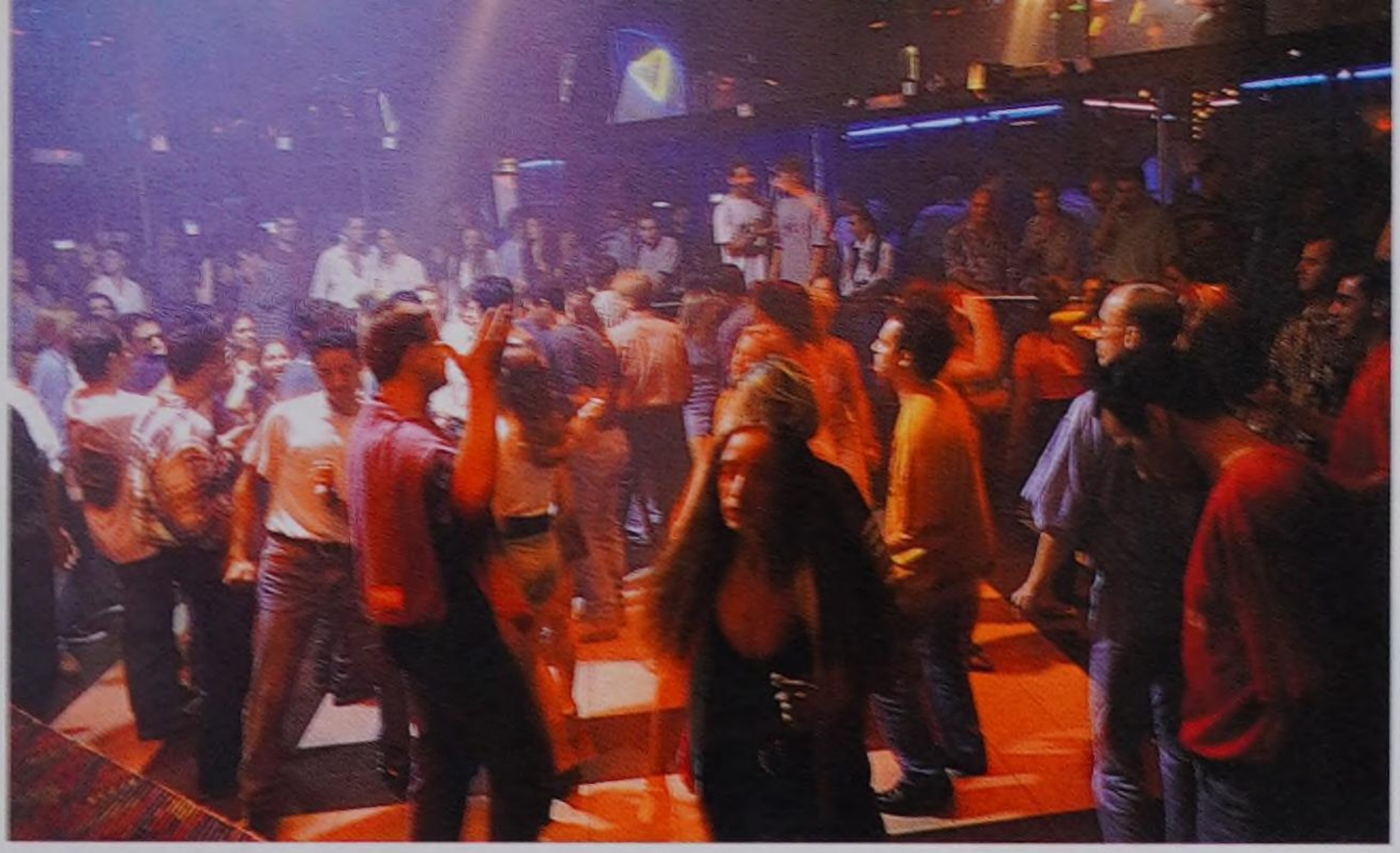
The local grocery

Maltese Honey – Sweet and Aromatic

Apparently it's the wild thyme that does it: Maltese honey has been known and held in high esteem ever since antiquity. It makes the ideal souvenir, and can be purchased either in the 'Wembley Store' in Valletta or in any of the island's highly colourful grocery shops.

Maltese Capers

We buy them in small jars, pickled in salt vinegar – no comparison to Maltese capers which grow wild on caper bushes *(Capparis Spinosa)*. Commercial European capers are actually the flower buds, and are harvested in April before they bloom. Capers are a distinctive feature of Maltese cuisine, and many housewives on the islands harvest and pickle their own.



Keeping pace in Paceville

Nightlife

There's not a lot of this in Valletta, the island's capital; the scene has shifted to Sliema, St Julian's and Bugibba, where there are numerous bars, pubs, cabarets, dance halls, discos and nightclubs.

Discos

Malta

Axis, St George's Road, St Julian's, tel: 344742.

Beachaven Discotheque, Xemxija Hill, Xemxija, tel: 573682.

Clouds Moodyblues Live, Dragonara Road, Paceville, tel: 319646.

Euphoria Disco and Nightclub, St George's Bay, St Julian's, tel: 341191.

Generator Disco, Paceville, St Julian's, tel: 341618.

Reeds Discotheque, Triq tal-Gardiel, Marsascala, tel: 684482.

Reflections Disco, Sunrest Hotel, Qawra, tel: 577101.

Rock Café and Tremours Disco, St George's Road, Paceville, tel: 337644.

Tattinger's Disco, Saqqajja Hill, Rabat, tel: 451104

Generating sounds

Gozo

La Grotta, Xlendi Road, Xlendi, tel: 551149.

Thunder Disco, Rabat.

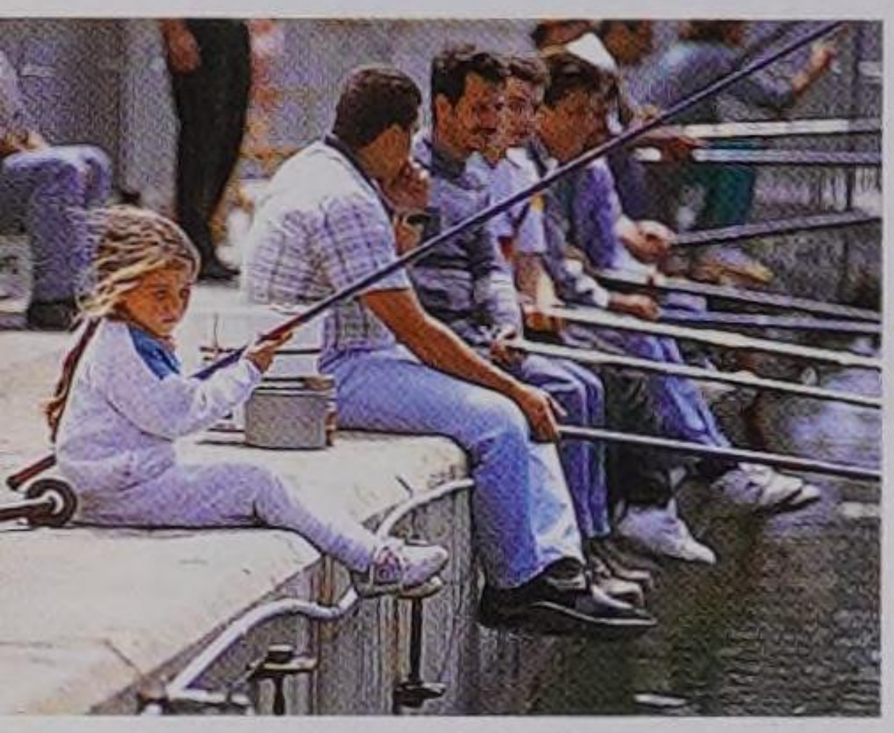
Casino

The Dragonara, Dragonara Palace, St Julian's, tel: 34 45 50/2. Those properly dressed (ie wearing a jacket and tie) can experience the world of international gambling and one-armed bandits here for a surprisingly low entrance fee. The casino's Marquis Room does extremely delicious food – and it's also amazingly cheap.

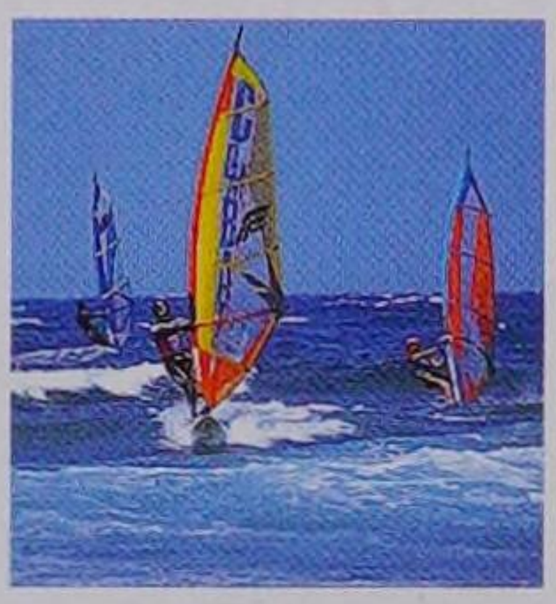
Sports and Recreation

Around 180km (111 miles) of sandy bays, rocky bays, steep coastline, flat coastline, and of course clear water and sunshine guaranteed: it all adds up to a lot of variety for visitors to Malta, Gozo and Comino. All kinds of water sports (sailing, surfing, water-skiing, motorboating, canoeing, diving, paragliding and sea-sausage riding) are available at the larger bays, and the tourist infrastructure is excellent. Those more attracted by solitude and silence can hike to any of the islands' numerous remote bays, cliffs and caves and have an unforgettable holiday.

Angling appeals to all ages



A windsurfer's paradise



Fishing

Angling is allowed everywhere, but fishing underwater is strictly forbidden, in the interests of protecting aquatic life. Snorkelling is allowed.

Boat hire – waterskiing – surfing

St George's Bay, St Paul's Bay, Mellieha Bay, Qawra Coast, Paradise Bay, Golden Bay, Gnejna Bay, Marsaxlokk, St Thomas Bay, Marsascala (Malta); Ramla Bay, Marsalforn, Xlendi (Gozo); Comino.

Sailboat and yacht charter

Nautica Ltd, 21 Msida Road, Gzira, tel: 345138.
Valletta Yacht Club, Manoel Island, tel: 331131.

Diving

Malta and Gozo, with their clear water, caves, reefs and cliffs, are ideal for divers and underwater photographers. The underwater flora and fauna is fascinating, and apart from all the colours there are also several wrecked ships and planes lying on the seabed offshore. Archaeological finds are quite common, but have to be reported. Unaccompanied divers need a diving permit called a 'C-Card' from the Department of Health, Merchants Street, Valletta, tel: 224071.

The clear water is ideal for divers

Diving schools

There are various diving courses available, and equipment can be hired. The tourist office supplies a brochure on diving, with addresses of schools and a list of the best diving locations.

Riding

There are several riding stables where horses and ponies can be hired: the Hal Ferh holiday village near Ghajn Tuffieha; near Ghadira on the road to Anchor Bay and Popeye Village; in the old farmhouse Ta'Cassia in Qawra; and in Victoria/Gozo, on the road to Marsalforn.

Bicycles and motorbikes

These can be rented on Malta at Qawra, Bugibba, St Paul's Bay and St Julian's, and at Marsalforn on Gozo. Cycling is a delightful way of seeing the islands – try to set out before it gets too hot.

Marsa Sports Club

All kinds of sports are available at this large club between Valletta and Gujda Airport, and short-term membership is available. The club has 19 tennis courts and also tennis coaches to go with them; 5 squash courts; an 18-hole mini-golf course; golfing instructors; swimming pool; fitness gym; billiard tables; restaurant and bar (tel: 233851).

Horse racing

This is very popular on Malta; every Sunday afternoon from October to May, the Maltese stream off to the Marsa Sports Ground to watch the horse and trap races.

Beach clubs

Day or seasonal membership is available for these, and they provide all-round service: all kinds of water sports, also deckchairs, sunshades, restaurants, open air bars, cafés and boutiques (Reef Club, Dragonara Peninsula; Lido San Gorg, St George's Bay).

Hiking

This is an unforgettable experience on Malta and Gozo, but remember to take maps, guides, good shoes, sunscreen and provisions.

Diving in the Blue Lagoon

KARTIERI
DODGE
Y--0661-M

Getting There

By plane

All schedule and charter flights arrive at Gujda International Airport; the schedule flights in daylight hours, the charter flights at night. There is no bus service from the airport to either the neighbouring village of Luqa or the capital, Valletta, but there are taxis, usually Mercedes.

Malta's national airline, Air Malta, operates from many European cities and some North African ones. In Britain, for enquiries, tel: 0181 785 3177. Air Malta flies from Heathrow, Gatwick, Glasgow, Birmingham and Manchester airports. Charter flights are available from a number of regional airports. Flying time from Britain is about 3 hrs 20 mins.

Taxis from the airport or, in the daylight hours, the regular bus service from Valletta, will be able to take you on to the port of Cirkewwa for the ferry over to Gozo. For transfers to Comino, contact the Comino Hotel which runs a ferry service from Cirkewwa to the island (tel: 473464 or 473718).

Opposite: a true veteran

Flying the flag

By sea

The only means of getting to the islands by sea is by car ferry from Sicily or Italy, or by a fast catamaran passenger-only service from Sicily that runs in good weather. The services run once a week to and from Naples (car ferry); three times a week from Reggio Calabria, Catania and Syracuse (by both car ferry and catamaran). The journey from Naples takes 24 hours. With this ferry the Catania–Malta and Syracuse–Malta trips take 8 hours and 5 hours respectively.

Also on the Catania route in the summer months is the car ferry *Ghawdex,* run by the Gozo Channel Company, tel: 243964.

The fast catamaran service is Malta-run by Virtu Rapid Ferries with five regular crossings a week. This passenger-only service goes to Pozzallo, the southernmost tip of Sicily, in 1 hr 30 mins, and to Catania in three hours.

In Malta most travel agents can arrange bookings for the fast catamaran service or information and bookings from the Virtu Rapid Ferries office, 3 Princess Elizabeth Terrace, Ta'Xbiex, Malta, tel: 318854.

Take the ferry from Italy or Sicily

By car

Arriving with a car does not require a permit, but the car must have 'Green Card' insurance specific to Malta. Cars may be imported to the islands for a period of up to three months; any longer will require special police permission. On arrival the car's engine and chassis numbers are logged by customs officers.

Signposting can present problems

Getting Around

By car

The Maltese drive on the left (officially, that is; *see below*), and the phone boxes and pillar boxes are red. Many cars are up to forty years old and still running – in fact, the islands are sometimes a bit reminiscent of an old British film set.

The speed limit in built-up areas is 25mph (40kmph); outside them it is 40mph (64kmph). There aren't many traffic lights, and roundabouts tend to predominate. Drivers already on the roundabout generally have priority – 'stop' signs mark the exceptions. On roads where no priority is marked, the rule is left before right. To say that the Maltese themselves kept to all these rules would be an exaggeration; after all, as the locals put it: 'You don't have to be crazy to drive in Malta, but it helps'. Bus and lorry drivers generally do just as they please; if the right-hand side of a road is in better condition than the left, they simply switch sides and travel on the wrong side – often for miles at a time. They also love exploiting their priority on roundabouts just because they're bigger – so beware. If an accident does occur the police need to be contacted (tel: 191); the positions of the vehicles involved mustn't be altered until they arrive. Less dramatic but still very unpleasant for those unfamiliar with Malta is the incredibly bad signposting: roadsigns are few and far between, and the only bilingual ones are in Valletta. It's best to memorise the Maltese words *Triq* and *Misrah* for street and square.

Filling stations all close at 6pm on weekdays, and there are only a handful open on Sundays and public holidays; their names and addresses can be found in *The* (Maltese) *Times* or the *Malta Independent*.

Karrozin are good fun

Hire cars

These are very good value (from Lm6 per day upwards). The steering wheel is on the right side, of course. It's best to take out comprehensive insurance. And before you set off – remember to keep to the left.

By taxi

Taxis are available in most central localities but are not that cheap; pre-paid tickets for taxis from the airport can be purchased from the airport terminal to avoid price haggling. There are also cab firms as alternatives. The one-horsepower variety in Valletta and Mdina known as *karrozzin* are good fun – but negotiate the price in advance!

By bus on Malta and Gozo

Maltese buses are extremely cheap, and look old-fashioned and comfortable at first sight; however, the bumpy roads and driving style can really shake passengers around.

On Malta, most of the bus routes start at City Gate in Valletta. Virtually everywhere can be reached by bus, though one usually has to travel via Valletta. Night routes have been introduced in popular areas (Sliema, Paceville, Bugibba in summer). In addition, a number of direct cross-routes (e.g. Bugibba to Marsaxlokk) have been introduced to avoid the need for changing buses.

Routes can be checked at the bus terminals in Valletta, Sliema or Bugibba, and timetables can be obtained at kiosks and stationery shops. The stops are marked with blue and red symbols. Always pay the driver, and have the right amount of change ready.

Buses are cheap

Ferries to Gozo

Getting from Malta to Gozo

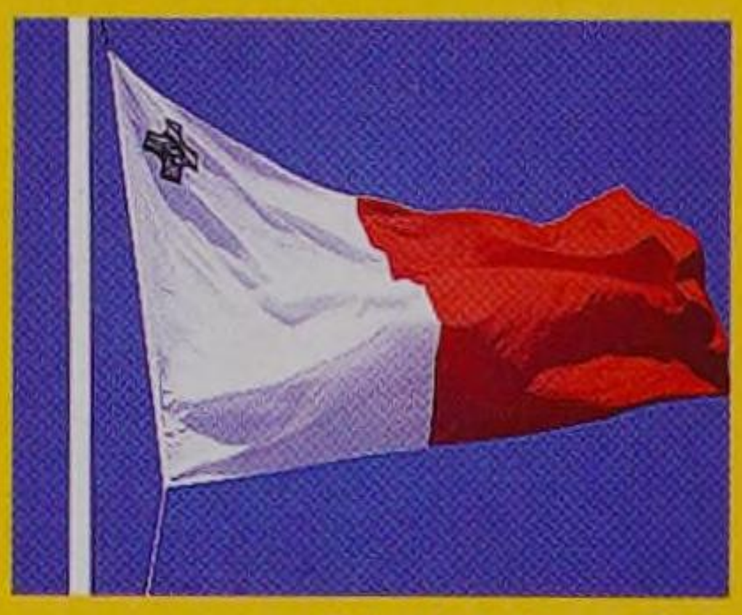
There are three ways to do this: the shortest route is via ferry from Cirkewwa on Malta to Mgarr on Gozo. They run hourly during the day and every two hours at night. The No 45 bus from Valletta and the No 48 from Bugibba connect with the ferries. Another ferry does morning and evening connections between Pietà (Malta) and Mgarr (Gozo). There's also an Express Hovercraft service that leaves from The Strand in Sliema, Sa Maison and Bugibba.

Air Malta has a helicopter service between March and October with up to 24 flights a day; the trip takes 10 minutes. Charter flights are also available.

Island cruises

Cruises around the islands are available from various travel agencies on Malta, and excursion boats depart from The Strand (Sliema) and Mellieha Bay. The firm to contact (via any travel agent) is called Captain Morgan Cruises.

For a description of the Valletta harbour cruise, which should not be missed, *see page 32*.



The Maltese flag

Facts for the Visitor

Travel documents

For stays not exceeding three months, visitors need only bring their passports. A residence permit has to be applied for where longer stays are involved.

Customs regulations

The following may be imported duty-free: 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or 250g tobacco; 1 litre of wine, 1 litre of spirits and personal travel items. Special customs declaration forms need to be filled out for any gifts being brought for inhabitants of Malta.

Exchange regulations

There is no limit on the amount of foreign currency that can be brought in or out of Malta. The limit for Maltese lire is Lm50 in and Lm25 out.

Information

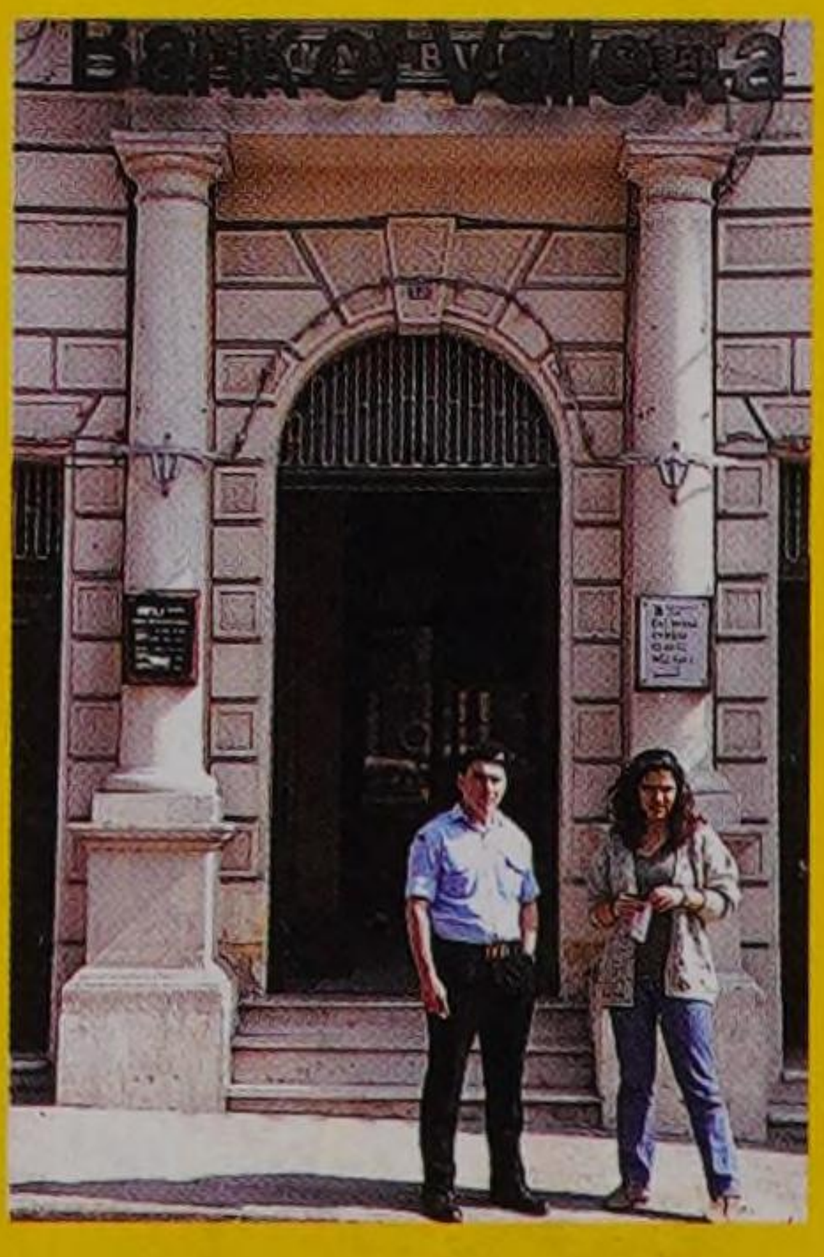
In the UK: Malta National Tourist Office, Suite 300, Mappin House, 4 Winsley Street, London W1N 7AR, tel: 0171-292 4900.

In the US: Malta National Tourist office, Empire State Building, 350 Fifth Avenue, Suite 4412, New York NY 10118, tel: 212-695 9520.

In Malta: The National Tourism Organisation of Malta (NTOM) has the following offices: 1 City Arcades, Valletta, tel: 237747; Gujda International Airport, Luqa, tel: 24966073/4; Mgarr Harbour, Mgarr, Gozo, tel: 558106; 1 Palm Street, Victoria, Gozo, tel: 553343.

The small brochure called *Welcome Holiday Guide* is also a very useful source of information and is available at all kiosks.

Banks open at 8am in summer



Currency and exchange

The Maltese pound, or *lira* (Lm), is divided into 100 cents (¢), the cent into 10 mils (m) – though the latter are becoming rare because of inflation. Eurocheques, credit cards and traveller's cheques are all accepted, and the automatic machines for changing foreign notes into Maltese currency are very handy. These 'Quick Change' machines can be found at Gujda Airport, Valletta, Sliema, Spinola Bay and Bugibba.

Opening times

Banks: 15 June until 30 September Monday to Friday 8am–12.45pm, Saturday 8am–12.30pm, Friday 2.30–4pm; 1 October until 14 June Monday to Friday 8.30am–12.45pm, Saturday 8.30am–noon, Tuesday and Friday 2.30–4pm.

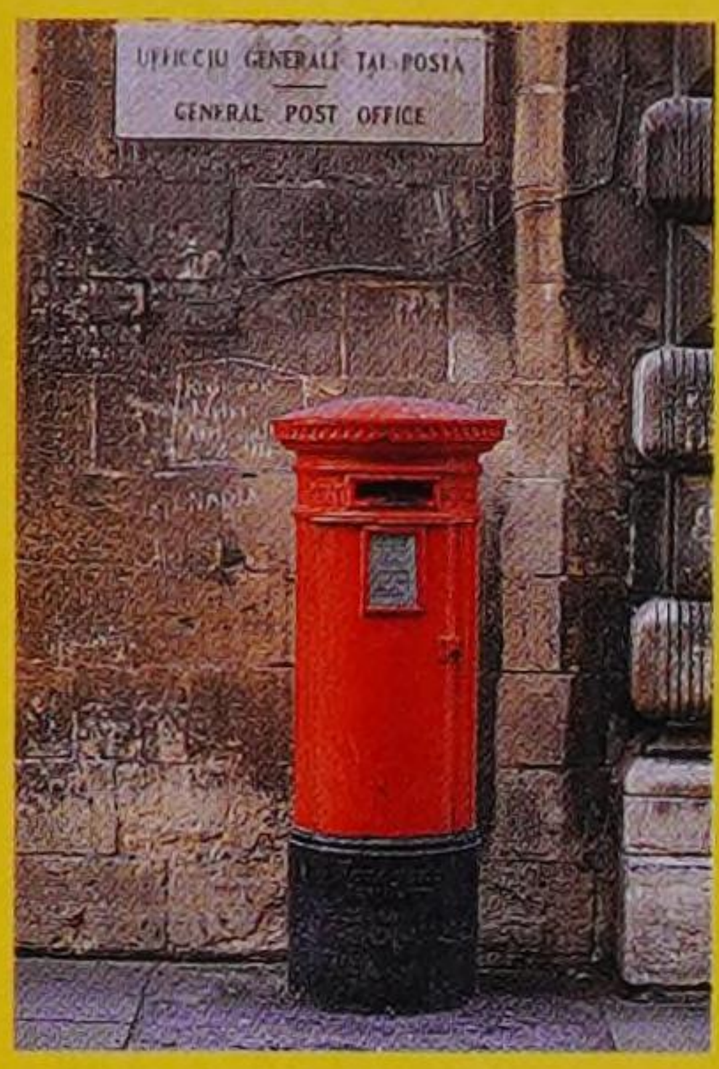
Post offices: Monday to Saturday 7.30am–12.45pm; main post office in Valletta and office at Gujda Airport 8am–6.30pm.

National museums on Malta: 16 June until 30 September Monday to Saturday 7.45am–2pm; 1 October until 15 June Monday to Saturday 8.15am–5pm, Sunday 8.15am–4pm. **On Gozo:** 16 June until 15 September Monday to Saturday 8.30am–7pm, Sunday 8.30am–3pm; 16 to 30 Sepember Monday to Saturday 8.30am–6.30pm; 1 October until 15 March Monday to Saturday 8.30am–4.30pm, Sunday 8.30am–3pm; 1 April until 15 June Monday to Saturday 8.30am–6.30pm, Sunday 8.30am–3pm. Admission free on Sunday; closed on public holidays.

Shops tend to be open from 9am–7pm with a midday break that can sometimes last several hours.

Petrol filling stations close daily at 6pm and are closed all day Sunday and public holidays; for exceptions check *The Times*.

Post boxes are red



Public holidays

1 January (New Year's Day); 10 February (St Paul's Shipwreck); 19 March (St Joseph); 31 March (Freedom Day); Good Friday; 1 May (Labour Day); 7 June (Sette Giugno); 20 June (Feast of SS Peter and Paul); 15 August (Feast of the Assumption); 8 September (Our Lady of Victories); 21 September (Independence Day); 8 December (Immaculate Conception); 13 December (Republic Day); 25 December (Christmas Day).

Time difference

Malta uses Central European Time (GMT + 1 hour), and in summer clocks are put 1 hour ahead (GMT + 2 hours).

Telephone

Use the red British-style call-boxes for local calls (use 5c coins). For operator assistance in Malta dial 194; on Gozo dial 894. For international enquiries dial 190. Most European counties and the US can be dialled direct. If calling Malta from overseas, simply dial the code 00 356, followed by the 6-digit number.

Newspapers

There are three English-language newspapers published in Malta: *The Times* is published seven days a week, as is *The Malta Independent*, while *The People* is a daily newspaper; all provide comprehensive information on everything that's happening on the islands.

Today's news

Tipping

A service charge is usually included in restaurant bills, and tipping isn't expected – but it isn't refused either.

Voltage

AC 240V. Three-pin British-type plugs. Australians and New Zealanders will need an adaptor, Americans should bring a transformer.

Weights and measures

Malta uses both the metric and Imperial systems, just like the UK.

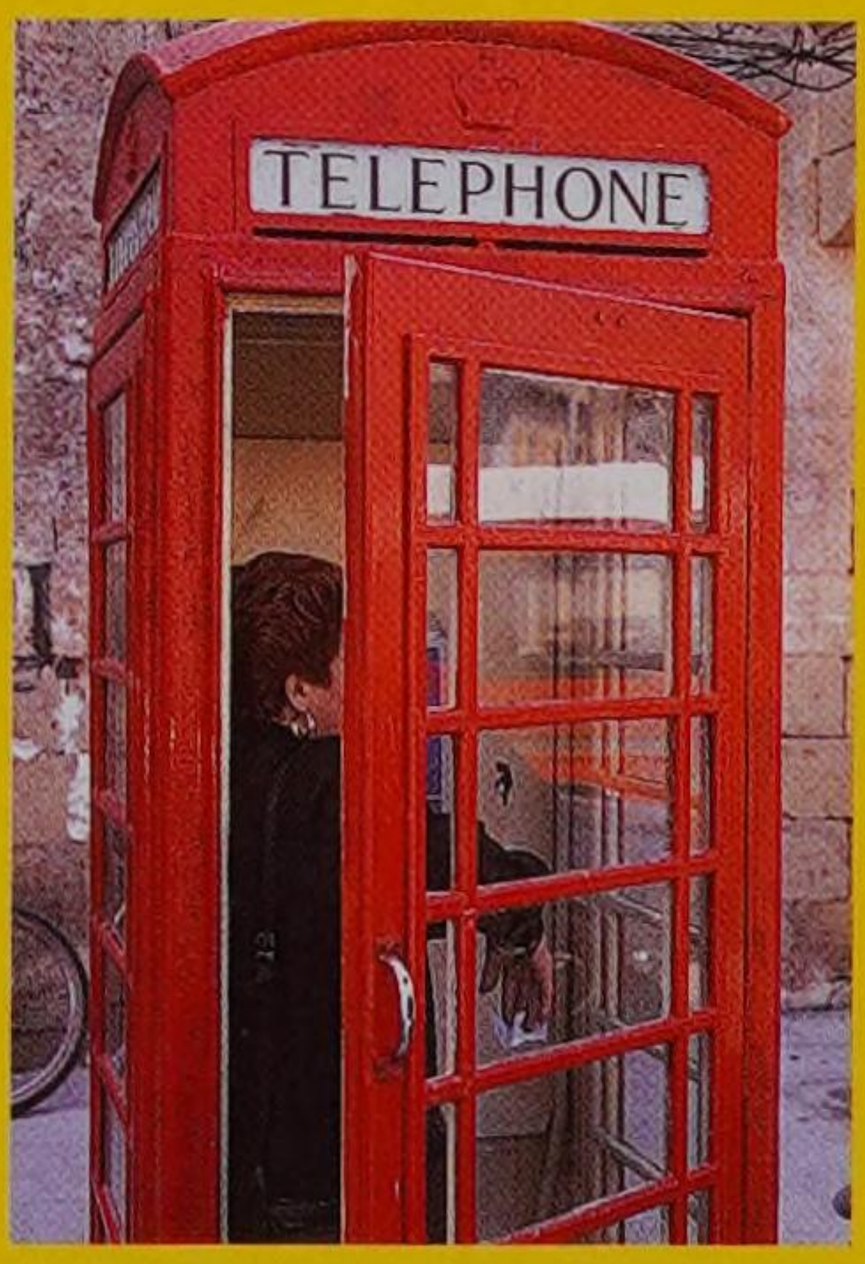
Medical assistance

Most health care is state-organised on Malta and Gozo. Britons and Australians who fall ill can take advantage of a reciprocal free medical care agreement between the two countries. This entitles treatment for a period of up to one month. Visitors from Canada and the US should take out adequate medical insurance.

All doctors on Malta and Gozo speak English. In case of an emergency: tel: 196. There are two state-run hospitals: St Luke's Gwardamangia, near Valletta, tel: 241125 or 234101, and Craig Hospital, Ghan Qatet Street, Victoria, Gozo, tel: 556851. There are also a number of private hospital-clinics that have state-of-the-art facilities (Capua Palace, tel: 335235; St Philip's, tel: 442211; St James's, tel: 692002).

For **dentists**, call directory enquiries, tel: 190, (tel: 890 from Gozo).

There are numerous pharmacies and chemists throughout the islands, though they have no recognisable symbol by which to identify them. They keep normal shop opening times, from 8.30 or 9am until 1pm and then 3.30–7pm. A roster of pharmacies open over the weekend is listed in the weekend newspapers. The qualified staff can dispense many products without a prescription.



Telephone boxes are easy to recognise

Disabled

The disabled can have a difficult time of things on these hilly islands with their bumpy roads. For information contact the Health Education Unit, tel: 321247, or the National Commission for the Handicapped, tel: 487789.

Emergencies

Police 191; ambulance 196; fire 199; air rescue 244371; sea rescue 238797 or 225040; breakdown service 224303; emergency plumbers 221901; electricity 220462; gas 871174; oil 871431.

Diplomatic representation

American Embassy: Development House, St Anne Street, Floriana, tel: 240424/5 or 243216/7.
British High Commission: 7 St Anne Street, Floriana, tel: 233135/6.

Accommodation

Malta provides everything in the way of accommodation, from luxury hotels to simple guest houses. Here are some recommended hotels, classified into three groups based on the price of a double room with bath or shower for one night, breakfast included:

$$$** – expensive first-class and luxury hotels (above Lm25); **$$ – moderately expensive hotels with 2- to 3-star ratings (Lm15–25).

Malta

$$$The Meridien Phoenicia, The Mall, Floriana, tel: 225241, fax: 235254. Stately mansion outside Valletta with magnificent grounds and pool.

$$$Corinthia Palace, De Paul Avenue, San Anton, tel: 440301, fax: 465713. Super-modern hotel with conference and shopping centre.

$$$Mercure Selmun Palace, Selmun, tel: 521040, fax: 521060. Restaurant in former Knights' palace (17th-century) and modern rooms, all with balconies, in very quiet location above St Paul's Bay and fine sandy beach nearby.

$$$Westin Dragonara Resort, Dragonara Road, St Julian's, tel: 381000, fax: 381348. New, luxurious five-star resort with extensive conference and leisure facilities.

$$$Lapsi Hotel, Balluta Bay, tel: 378800, fax: 373227. New seafront hotel overlooking picturesque Balluta Bay near St Julian's. Superbly furnished and equipped.

$$Osborne, 50 South Street, Valletta, tel: 243656. Medium-priced hotel with spacious rooms and roof terrace, near the central bus station.

$$New Dolmen, Bugibba, tel: 581510. Large family hotel facing into the bay with pools, water sports, tennis and gym.

Gozo

$$$L-Imgarr, Mgarr, tel: 560455, fax: 557589. Above the harbour, luxury rooms, large bathrooms and veranda.

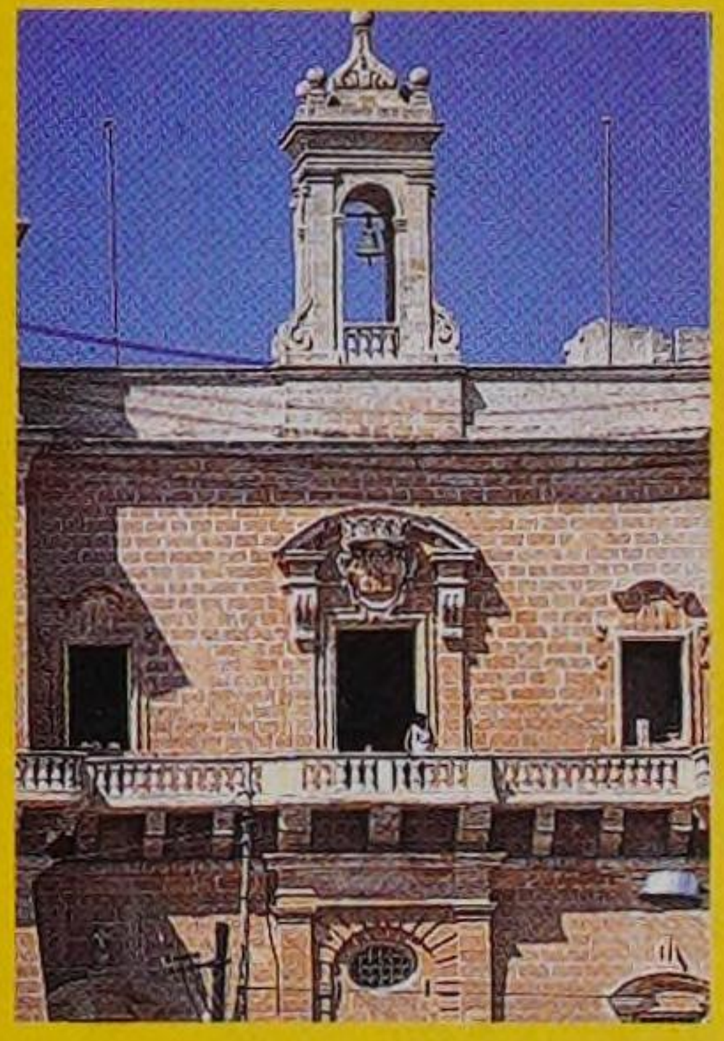
$$Andar, Munxar Street, Munxar, tel: 560736, fax: 560737. New and relatively small hotel in rural surroundings, swimming pool, international cuisine.

$$Patrick Hotel, Xlendi, Xlendi Bay, tel: 562951. Comfortable accommodation right on the bay front.

$$Gozo Bella Vista Farmhouses, Srug Street, Xaghra, tel: 561750, fax: 563341. Tastefully converted cluster of farmhouses with private swimming pools and jacuzzis.

Comino

$$$Comino Hotel, Comino Island, tel: 529821, fax: 529826. Ten tennis courts, good water sports in summer.



Mercure Selmun Palace Hotel

New Dolman Hotel, Bugibba

Index

Archbishop's Palace, Valletta 29
Armier Bay 39
Auberge d'Angleterre et de Bavière 29
Auberge d'Aragon 29
Auberge d'Italie 31
Auberge of Castile 19
Azure Window 70

Banca Giuratele 44
Bastion Square 44
Bingemma 61–2
Birkirkara 52
Birzebbuga 57
Blue Grotto 58
Blue Lagoon 71
Borg in-Nadur 57
Bugibba 38
Buskett Gardens 47–8

Calypso's Grotto 69
Casa Inguanez 44
Castellania 31
Cathedrals:
St John's Co-Cathedral 23–5
St Paul's Anglican Cathedral 28–9
St Paul's, Mdina ... 42–3
Victoria 66
Churches:
Assumption, Birkirkara 52
Carmelite Church, ... 43
Gesú 30
Jesus of Nazareth 36
Our Lady of Lourdes 66
Our Lady of Mount Carmel 28
Our Lady of Victories 19
St Catherine, Valletta 19
St Catherine, Zejtun 51–2
St Dominic 30
St Francis 22
St Gregory, Chapel of 52
St Helena 53
St Lawrence, Vittoriosa 49
St Marija Assunta 53
St Mary, Attard 54
St Paul the Shipwrecked 30–1
St Paul's, Rabat 46
St Philip 54
St Saviour, Lija 53
Ta'Grazzia 51
Ta'Bir Miftuh, Chapel of 52
Ta'Pinu 69–70
Visitation 70
Xewkija 66
Cirkewwa 39
Citadel, Gozo 66
Clapham Junction 48
Comino 71
Corte Capitanale 42
Covered market 30
Crafts Centre, Gozo 67

Dingli Cliffs 62
Dockyard Creek 34

Floriana 32
Fort Ricasoli 35
Fort Rinella 51
Fort St Angelo 35, 49
Fort St Elmo 29
Fort St Michael 35, 51
French Creek 34
Fungus Rock 70

Ggantija Temples 68
Ghadira Bird Sanctuary 39
Ghajn Tuffieha, Roman Baths 61
Gharb 70
Ghar Dalam 57
Ghar Hasan 58
Ghar Lapsi 62
Gnejna Bay 61
Golden Bay 60–1
Gozo 65–70
Grand Harbour 34
Grand Master's Palace 26–7

Hal Saflieni Hypogeum 55–6
Harbour Cruise 32–5
Hastings Gardens 21

Inland Sea, Gozo 70
Inquisitor's Palace 50

Kalkara Creek 51
Knights of St John 13

Law Courts 25
Lazaretto Creek 32
Lower Barracca Gardens 30

Madonna Tal-Providenza 62
Manoel Island 36
Malta Film Studios 51
Manoel Theatre 28
Marsalforn 69
Marsamxett Harbour ... 33
Marsaskala 63
Marsaxlokk 55, 63
Mdina 40–5
Mdina Dungeons 41
Mdina Experience Show 44
Mellieha Bay 39
Mgarr, Malta 61
Mgarr, Gozo 66
Msida Creek 33
Museums:
Archaeological Museum, Gozo 67
Cathedral Museum, Mdina 42
Cathedral Museum, Valletta 25
Cathedral Museum, Victoria 67–8
Folklore Museum, Gozo 68
Maritime Museum, Vittoriosa 50
Museum of Natural History, Mdina 42
National Museum of Archaeology 22–3
National Museum of Fine Arts 21–2
National War Museum, Fort St Elmo 29
Roman Villa Museum, Rabat 45
Ta'Kola Windmill Museum 68–9

National Malta Library 25

Paceville 37
Palace Armoury 26
Palazzo Falzon 43
Palazzo Gatto-Murina . 44
Palazzo Parisio 31
Palazzo Santa Sophia 43
Palazzo Testaferrata 44
Palazzo Verdelin 27–8
Paradise Bay 39
Popeye Village 60
Pretty Bay 57

Qormi 52

Rabat 45–7
Red Tower 39
Rinella Creek 35

Sacra Infirmeria 29
San Anton Palace 54
Senglea 35, 51
Siggiewi 54
Sliema 36–7
Sliema Creek 32, 36
Spinola Bay 37
Splash and Fun Park, ... 38
St Agatha's catacombs 47
St John's Cavalier 20
St Julian's 37–8
St Paul's Bay 38
St Paul's Islands 38
St Paul's catacombs 46

Ta'Dbiegi Crafts Village 70
Ta'Qali Crafts Centre .. 58
Tarxien Temples 56–7
Temples of Hagar Qim 58–9
Temples of Mnajdra 59
The Malta Experience 30
Torre del Standardo 42
Triton Fountain, Valletta 19

Upper Barracca Gardens 19

Valletta 18–32
Vedette, Senglea 34, 51
Verdala Castle 47
Victoria 66–8
Victoria Lines 61–2
Vilhena Palace 42
Vittoriosa 35, 49–51

War Rooms 20
Wied-iz-Zurrieq 58
Wignacourt Aqueduct . 52

Xara Palace 42
Xerri's Grotto 68
Xlendi Bay 70

Zabbar 51
Zebbug 54
Zejtun 51
Zurrieq 58

© APA Publications GmbH & Co. Verlag KG Singapore Branch, Singapore.

Insight Compact Guide

Malta

Written by Wolfgang Thoma
English version by David Ingram
Photography and cover picture by Glyn Genin
Design: Carlotta Junger
Maps: Polyglott / Huber

Editorial Director: Brian Bell
Managing Editor: Tony Halliday

NO part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without prior written permission of *Apa Publications*. Brief text quotations with use of photographs are exempted for book review purposes only.

CONTACTING THE EDITORS: As every effort is made to provide accurate information in this publication, we would appreciate it if readers would call our attention to any errors and omissions by contacting:
Apa Publications, PO Box 7910, London SE1 8ZB, England.
Fax: (44 171)-620-1074,
e-mail: insight@apaguide.demon.co.uk

Information has been obtained from sources believed to be reliable, but its accuracy and completeness, and the opinions based thereon, are not guaranteed.

© 1998 APA Publications GmbH & Co. Verlag KG Singapore Branch, Singapore.

First Edition 1995 (updated 1998)

Printed in Singapore by Insight Print Services (Pte) Ltd

Original edition © Polyglott-Verlag Dr Bolte KG, Munich

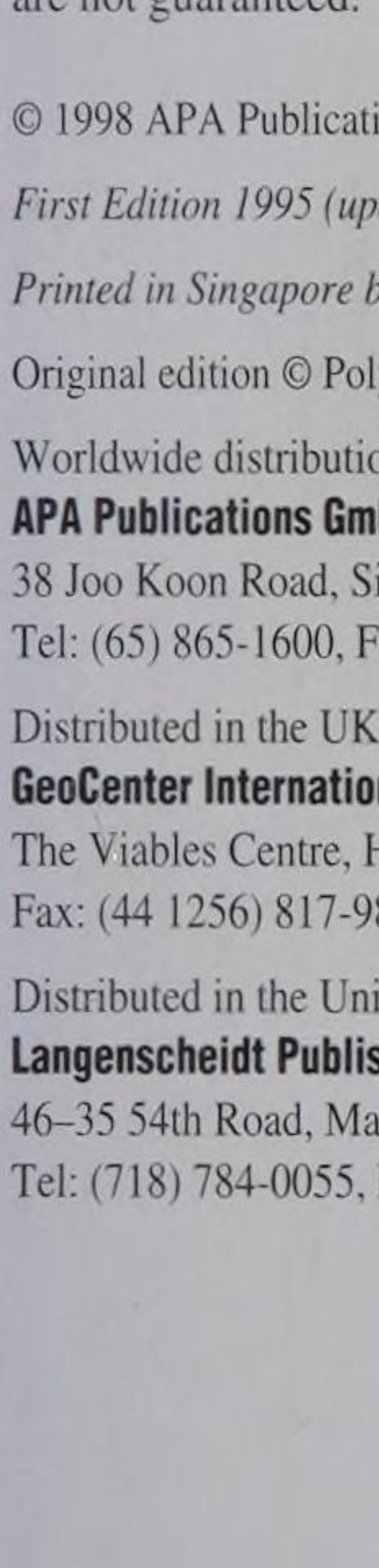
Worldwide distribution enquiries:
APA Publications GmbH & Co. Verlag KG Singapore Branch, Singapore
38 Joo Koon Road, Singapore 628990
Tel: (65) 865-1600, Fax: (65) 861-6438

Distributed in the UK & Ireland by:
GeoCenter International Ltd
The Viables Centre, Harrow Way, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG22 4BJ
Fax: (44 1256) 817-988

Distributed in the United States by:
Langenscheidt Publishers, Inc.
46–35 54th Road, Maspeth, NY 11378
Tel: (718) 784-0055, Fax: (718) 784-0640

INSIGHT COMPACT GUIDES

Algarve
Amsterdam
Bahamas
Bali
Bangkok
Barbados
Barcelona
Beijing
Belgium
Berlin
Brittany
Brussels
Budapest
Burgundy
Copenhagen
Costa Brava
Costa Rica
Crete
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Denmark
Dominican Republic
Dublin
Egypt
Finland
Florence
Gran Canaria
Greece
Holland
Hong Kong
Ireland
Israel
Italian Lakes
Italian Riviera
Jamaica
Jerusalem
Lisbon
Madeira
Mallorca
Malta
Milan
Moscow
Munich
Normandy
Norway
Paris
Poland
Portugal
Prague
Provence
Rhodes
Rome
Salzburg
St Petersburg
Singapore
Switzerland
Sydney
Tenerife
Thailand
Turkey
Turkish Coast
Tuscany
UK regional titles:
Bath & Surroundings
Cambridge & East Anglia
Cornwall
Cotswolds
Devon & Exmoor
Edinburgh
Lake District
London
New Forest
North York Moors
Northumbria
Oxford
Peak District
Scotland
Scottish Highlands
Shakespeare Country
Snowdonia
South Downs
York
Yorkshire Dales
USA regional titles:
Boston
Cape Cod
Chicago
Florida
Florida Keys
Hawaii: Maui
Hawaii: Oahu
Las Vegas
Los Angeles
Martha's Vineyard & Nantucket
New York
San Francisco
Washington DC
Venice
Vienna
West of Ireland



APA INSIGHT GUIDES

Our checklist to meet all your travel needs:

- ***Insight Guides*** **provide the complete picture and the top photography. The ideal background information and travel planner. Nearly 200 titles.**
- ***Insight Pocket Guides*** **focus on the best choices for places to see and things to do, picked by our correspondents. Include large fold-out maps. More than 100 titles.**
- ***Insight Compact Guides*** **are the books to carry with you for on-the-spot easy reference. Almost 100 titles.**

KM-748-989

INSIGHT COMPACT GUIDES

£4.99

ISBN 962-421-841-2

00499

9 789624 218411

0 3 miles
0 3 kilometres

(1) routes described

Marsalforn
Zebbug
Xaghra
Gharb
Nadur
Qala
San Lawrenz
Victoria
Kercem
Xewkija
Ghajnsielem
Mgarr
Sannat
Xlendi
Gozo
North Comino Channel
Comino
South Comino Channel
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
MARFA RIDGE
Mellieha Bay
Qawra
St. Paul's Bay
Bugibba
Mellieha
MELLIEHA RIDGE
St. Julian's
Sliema
Valletta
Gzira
Naxxar
Mosta
Msida
Floriana
Ghain Tuffieha
Mgarr
Balzan
Birkirkara
Senglea
Zabbar
VICTORIA LINES
Attard
Hamrun
Paola
Marsaskala
Tarxien
Mdina
Luqa
Zejtun
Mtahleb
Rabat
Zebbug
Marsaxlokk
Gudja
Siggiewi
Kirkop
Birzebbuga
Marsaxlokk Bay
Dingli
Qrendi
Zurrieq
Malta